

TO DUSTY DEATH

By the same Author

THE WIND AND THE FLAME

TO DUSTY DEATH

by

MANES SPERBER

translated from the German by

CONSTANTINE FITZGIBBON



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TO ARTHUR KOESTLER

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DRAMATIS PERSONAE

To Dusty Death is the second volume of a trilogy, of which the first, *The Wind and the Flame*, was published in English in 1951. Since many of the characters which occur, or are referred to, in this volume play a greater or smaller part in the first book, it has been thought advisable to include the following, brief *dramatis personæ*. Characters are listed in the order of their appearance in *To Dusty Death*.

DOINO FABER: Born in Polish Austria, 1902. Joined the Communist Party immediately after the First World War. Studied in Vienna and was much influenced by his teacher and close friend, Baron Erich von Stetten. Was an important figure in international Communism in the late twenties and early thirties. Then, with the change that led to the Moscow trials and the triumphs of totalitarian Stalinism, became increasingly pushed aside. Imprisoned by the Nazis, 1933-4. After a long and intense intellectual and moral struggle, he finally broke with the Communist Party in 1937.

BARON ERICH VON STETTEN: Born 1870. A celebrated Austrian historian and sociologist. A brilliant, sceptical humanist with a mordant wit and a contemptuous distrust for political panaceas of any variety.

VASSO MILITCH: A Yugoslavian, born 1900. An early leader of the Yugoslav Communist Party, he was an extremely talented, brave and fine man, the highest type of idealistic revolutionary. Deprived of political power in the mid-thirties and murdered in a Moscow prison, 1937, after refusing to compromise with the new morals of the Soviet leaders.

DJOURA: A Yugoslavian, born 1890 of peasant background. A poet and novelist, frequently arrested in his own country for revolutionary activity, but not a member of the Party. Imprisoned in Moscow, 1937, but released.

MARA MILITCH: A Yugoslavian, born 1901 of aristocratic parentage. Wife of Vasso Militch and, like him, a Communist. Imprisoned and tortured by the political police in Yugoslavia in the 1920's. Escaped from Moscow, 1937, shortly before her husband was murdered there.

ALBERT GRÄFE: A German working man, born 1908. A Communist suspected by the Party of 'deviationism', he was handed over to the Gestapo in 1934. After torture escaped from the concentration camp, but found that the Communist Party had expelled him. Went to Norway, where he had friends, and tried to explain to Doino what had happened. Though Doino refused at that time to listen to him, this was the revelation of Party baseness which finally forced Doino to break with the Party. While Gräfe was in prison his wife Erna, a simple-minded woman, was persuaded by emissaries of the Party that she had betrayed him. In great wretchedness she killed herself.

EINHARD VON STETTEN: Stetten's younger son, whom he loved very deeply and who was killed at the age of seventeen, on the Italian front, during the First World War. This was the greatest tragedy of Stetten's life.

WALTER VON STETTEN: Stetten's elder son. He became, much to his father's disgust, a Nazi. He was killed by accident during the Roehm massacre of June 1934. His German widow, Marlies, subsequently married a high Nazi official of the name of Tann. Her child, Agnes, born in 1933, she allowed Stetten to adopt in exchange for a gift of money.

MONSIGNOR GRABER: An Austrian priest with great influence on the Dollfuss government. An austere, cold and pitiless individual, he refused Stetten's request that he intervene with the authorities to save the life of a wounded working man condemned to death for participation in the Austrian Civil War of February 1934.

HOFER: An Austrian socialist leader who played a prominent part in the fighting of February 1934.

DR. EDI RUBIN: A Jewish-Austrian biologist and a Socialist. Originally standing aloof from politics, he felt compelled to fight with the Viennese Socialists in 1934. After the Socialist defeat he was forced to emigrate, first to Prague and then to Paris. From that time on he was a politically active Socialist, constantly opposed to Communism.

THE BARONESS (MARIE-THERÈSE): Mara's eccentric aunt. Rich and aristocratic, her attitude has remained purely feudal.

KAREL: A sinister individual, Yugoslavian by origin, who perhaps typifies the men who took over control of the Communist Party after the liquidation of the idealists, as exemplified by Vasso and Doino. An extremely powerful and ruthlessly ambitious man, who was yet at one time honourable.

HANUSIA: A Ukrainian woman. Widow of a Communist expelled from the Party in the twenties for Trotskyism and who died fighting with the Socialists in Austria, 1934. She subsequently lived for a short time with Doino, by whom she had a child – though this he never knew. She emigrated to Canada with her child in 1935, where she re-married.

RELLY: An Austrian writer, born 1905. She was Doino's mistress in the 1920's. He left her in a callous fashion, because the emotional demands she made upon him interfered with his Party work. She later married Dr Edi Rubin, by whom she had a child, Paul.

JOSMAR GOEBEN: A stolid and unimaginative middle-class German, born 1908, he became a hard-working and devout Communist. He worked for Soennecke in the anti-Nazi underground, and was primarily instrumental in the death of Erna Gräfe. Because he knew too much about the Party's crimes and mistakes in Germany, an attempt was made to murder him in Spain during the Civil War. He and Dr Rubin were old friends from schooldays. When he escaped from Spain he left the Party.

ANDREI BOCEK: An idealistic young Yugoslavian Communist, betrayed to the Yugoslav police for reasons of Party policy in 1932, almost certainly by Karel. Murdered in cold blood on the orders of the head of the Yugoslav Political Police.

MIROSLAV HRVATIC ('SLAVKO'): The head of the Yugoslav Political Police. A cruel and corrupt, though clever, man, responsible for many murders and atrocities.

HROJE BRANKOVIC ('VOYKO'): A Yugoslavian Communist who did not agree with the new Party line. Betrayed to Slavko by Karel and murdered in 1932.

THEA: A rich German woman, born 1899. After leading an unhappy and promiscuous life in Berlin, she was able to save Josmar Goeben from the Nazis in 1934. She fell in love with him, but he refused to stay with her as his Party work was more important to him at that time than either his or her personal emotions.

DR GRUNDER: A prominent Austrian Socialist with whom Stetten had come in contact during the Viennese Civil War.

JOCHEN VON ILMING: A homosexual German war-hero and nationalist poet. Involved with right-wing terrorists, he eventually joined the Nazi Party. He was imprisoned at the time of the Roehm massacres of 1934 but subsequently released and allowed to emigrate.

HERBERT SOENNECKE: A German working man, born 1890. A former leader of the German Communist Party and of the anti-Nazi Communist underground in Germany, his sensible, upright and straightforward opinions became increasingly distasteful to Moscow. Arrested in Moscow in 1937, he refused to play a part in a State Trial. He was murdered by the Russians in prison.

PART ONE

All Our Yesterdays . . .

CHAPTER I

WHEN Stetten, his old teacher, brought him back a few weeks before, Doino believed that he would soon be able to start afresh. Though its taste may have grown bitter, hope yet remains an incentive for life, and for courage—or so he had said to himself that night in the train which carried him home.

But as day succeeded day the burden of living grew heavier to bear and he longed for an end of being. The only barrier was the last dregs of hope. He waited with impatience for them, too, to dry up.

He was drawn to the woods, to obscure alleyways, to closed, nocturnal gateways. It was as though he hoped, in the changelessness of objects, to find again the years that were gone. This search caused him pain, inevitably, since it was not tokens of the past that he was after, but the past's actual presence. At times, he thought, he was like a woman with a darkened mind trying to remember the pure, clear laughter of her still-born child.

He had already discovered, in prison and in the concentration camp, that when the present grows remote the past becomes confusingly actual. But now he was no prisoner. Now he had nothing to expect and nothing to fear. His memories were so many open wounds from which his recollections trickled like streams of blood. At thirty-five what was it that he was looking for in the boy of sixteen or of eighteen that he had once been? Forgiveness? Pity? The boy was pitiless, his judgments beyond the reach of any appeal. There is only one way out of a revolution and that is through the door that leads into nothingness.

Stetten had taken his grand-daughter away from the city and Doino was to join them in the near future. The country house was spacious, with more rooms than they could use. Yet he kept postponing his departure, constantly finding new reasons for this, reasons which were really only pretexts. It was as though he were awaiting someone whose arrival had not been announced, something that would now never happen. He who awaits the return of one who is dead is not more hopeless. For he knows the name and the features of the dead person, and from time to time he may think to hear his step upon the stairs or his cough outside the door.

While the nights grew slowly cooler, after the blistering heat of the day, he would often sit at his window, sometimes until dawn, his eyes fixed on the trees of the little wood across the way, as though it were his duty to watch over their sleep, listening to the murmur of the wind among their branches, the beating of a heart that was tired. No, he told himself, he was not waiting for anybody.

During the day he read a great deal. At fixed times he listened to the news from Spain on the radio; it still affected him, generally in a painful way. Often he was driven to walk through the streets of the city, with no apparent purpose, until at last, exhausted by the exercise and the heat, he would sit down in some park and there would wait, with the patience of the elderly, for the sun to sink.

Once one of these old people spoke to him.

'It's very strange,' he said. 'You've worked at the same place, for years on end probably, had your own locker to keep your stuff in, and if one day you didn't turn up people would wonder what had happened to you. But then, all of a sudden and for no reason, you've lost your job - and nobody worries what's happened to you, nobody asks about you at all. And at last you come to think maybe you're just that sort of person, maybe you always were unnecessary, and it's just that nobody ever noticed it before. I mean, because they can get on so well without you now. See what I mean?'

'Yes,' Doino replied. 'I see what you mean. Nowadays I think of myself as unnecessary, and sometimes it does seem to me that I must always have been so.'

'Oh, well,' said the old man, in an attempt to cheer him up, 'it's not really so bad as all that. After all, a man's not alone in this world. He has a wife, kids, and then he gets older and he's got grandchildren. Nobody ever asks you what your ambitions used to be when you were young, whether you worked hard at school, for instance. Now take me . . .'

So Doino waited for the sun to go down and listened to the tales of the old men and the old women. They were all very much alike, only sometimes the tone of voice varied. Some were proud of their renunciation, as though that were their greatest act and their supreme achievement of will; others spoke of it with bitterness, as of a humiliation that had to be endured afresh with each new day.

In the midst of one such conversation Doino suddenly got up and walked away. He went to see a man whom he had not met for many years, a man with whom he was linked, not by friendship, but by something that Doino had once done for him.

The wife opened the door. She did not immediately invite him to cross her threshold. For a moment she wondered whether she might pretend not to recognise him. But Doino's steady gaze made this impossible.

'You almost missed us,' she said, as she led him through the dark hall into the dining-room. 'We were supposed to have gone to the country yesterday. We're leaving tomorrow, by the early train.'

'I don't want to send you away,' she began again, without taking her eyes from his dusty shoes, 'but I don't think there's much point in your waiting. Leopold won't be home till late.'

'Come, sit down, Hilde. Over there, where I can see you. That's right. Why did you pretend you didn't recognise me? If you'll give me a straight answer, maybe I'll go away again at once.'

She seated herself on the very edge of the chair, stared at the table, and said nothing. Her forehead was too low, her nose and her chin were too small, and that was what stopped her from being a beautiful woman; so thought Doino, gazing at her as if it were her portrait and not herself that he was examining. Fine black hair, silky to the touch perhaps. Good figure. But too mean, too grasping. That's why she's not a beauty. She remained silent, it didn't matter, he had plenty of time. The room in which they sat was cool and quiet. He closed his eyes.

At last she said:

'Why have you come here? And why just now? What do you want with my Leopold?'

'Listen carefully, Hilde. In the course of my life I've done a great deal. Now, these days – I'm not very well these days, and if you didn't keep staring at the table or my shoes you'd have noticed it – I've been thinking about all I've done and I've been wondering about the sense of my past actions. And an idea has occurred to me: maybe the only proper thing, the only important thing I've ever done was to get Leopold out of that trouble, to make it possible for him to study, to marry – prematurely, perhaps – to make a career for himself. So here I am and my dusty shoes are dirtying your carpet, and all because I want to know whether——'

'It's not true,' she interrupted. 'You don't want to know anything. You just want to cash in on his gratitude. Maybe you're planning to drag my husband into your political game. Or maybe you're just broke.'

'No, I don't need money. But there is something that I do need, and urgently. Perhaps——'

Again she interrupted him:

'For years we've been waiting for this, Leopold and me, too, waiting for you to come to us as a friend because you need something, something we have. You've got no idea how much Leopold has suffered from the way you ignored his friendship. I don't want to even think about it any more, but I hate you, and now he hates you too. Your picture used to hang on the wall. It's not there any longer. There's another picture in its place. Do you know who it's of, that new picture? It's of Hitler. Yes, we're Nazis now. And now you know.'

At last the woman looked him straight in the face. Despite the violence with which she had spoken her body remained motionless. He said:

'Once you begged me not to infect him with politics. Remember? You came to see me, early one morning, beside yourself with excitement and fear, and you said to me over and over again: "I beseech you . . . as a matter of life and death . . ."'

'I remember. But what has that got to do with friendship?'

'And what has Nazism got to do with friendship ignored?'

'Since then almost all Leopold's colleagues have become Nazis. As for him, he hasn't been able to avoid talking about you, and so they all know. If Hitler should come here now – and he's sure to come – why should we be made to suffer because of a friendship that was so valueless to you that you couldn't even be bothered to answer letters?'

'I see,' Doino said slowly. He got up and walked towards the door. 'Don't tell Leopold I have been here.'

He was already out in the street when the woman came running after him. She blocked his way, saying:

'Come back! Wait for him! Forgive me, I should not have said what I did. Now that you're so unhappy none of that applies. And besides, it's all been my fault. I've always been so jealous. And I was frightened that you'd disrupt our life, that you'd involve us in . . . in adventures. Forgive me. Please come back!'

He freed his hand gently from hers and walked on. She cried after him: 'Doino! Doino!'

This was the first time since she had known him that she had called him by this name. He shook his head without looking back, turned to the right into the first alleyway, saw a tram, ran towards it, and jumped on to the front platform.

He felt tears welling up in his eyes. Yes, he had developed a tendency to cry during these last months. He put on his dark glasses to cover the tears. The only man from whom he would have felt no compunction to

hide his tears, Vasso, was dead, murdered in Moscow. And after the death of his friend the world had shrunken and become empty. All other friendships soon withered, dying with the death of that one man.

Doino looked up in amazement. He was the only passenger on the platform, so the strange question must have been addressed to him. The driver, with both hands on the steering bars, had half turned towards him and now repeated:

'A bereavement? Someone dear to you?'

Doino touched his cheeks with his right hand. They were wet. The thick frames of the dark glasses had not sufficed to hold his tears back.

The man swung back the right-hand bar and the tram stopped. Nobody got on. They were nearing the terminus. The man said:

'I know how it is. I'm a widower myself.'

He was speaking not from curiosity but from kindness. Therefore Doino had to reply.

'It's not a wife. It's my friends they killed.'

'Ah!' said the man. He was astonished and he now turned right round and gave Doino a searching look. 'In Germany? Those damned Nazis?'

'Yes, in Germany. And elsewhere.'

They had arrived.

'Wait just a minute, please,' the driver said. He was soon back. 'Listen,' he said, 'we're all old socialists here, and nobody's going to change that. And you see, so that you'll know that there's a solidarity, I've collected these few shillings. And if maybe you've nowhere to go tonight, I can always put you up.'

Doino thanked him but said he needed nothing. They shook hands. The employees at the depot came up and one by one they gave him the socialist greeting.

'Friendship, comrade!'

'Friendship!' he replied.

He thanked them once again. His voice was colourless and his throat constricted. He left them quickly and walked towards the woods.

The foliage was lit as by leaping flames; the tops of the trees were caught in the rays of the setting sun.

The walk through the woods calmed him and changed the course of his thoughts. Thirteen, twelve, eleven years ago he had chosen to take this roundabout way when returning to his furnished room in the hotel at the western edge of the wood. Since Stetten had left Vienna, he had gone back to that hotel. Even after so many years they had not forgotten him and had given him back his old room. The passing years

had marred and bloated the body of the proprietress, but her face was still pretty and her eyes still held their gay promise.

She had said: 'If you've had enough of living in the city, give it up and come back to us. We were used to your ways.' She did not know that he had come from far away, and she quickly forgave him all the years he had not visited them, even though, as she had believed, it would have meant for him simply a twenty-five minute ride on the tram. He was, she thought, a careless sort of man in some ways. For example, there was the little trunk and the full rucksack that he had left behind. He'd never come back for them. But she'd kept them in a safe place, away from the moths and the damp.

He had a quick wash, changed his clothes, and seated himself at the window. Dusk was falling, enveloping the foliage in ever darkening shadows, until at last all colour was gone and the trees were nothing but their own silhouettes.

Carefully he picked up in both hands the bowl of cold coffee left over from his breakfast. As he bowed his head towards it he saw his own face reflected, vaguely at first, but then in clear outline: the white temples, the dark eye hollows, the prominent cheek-bones, the narrow line of the mouth. He had examined his features in this manner once before; that was the evening when they had moved him, after twelve days in the communal cell, to solitary confinement in another prison in order, as they put it, 'to be done with him the quicker'. He had spent hours in the Black Maria, in a sort of box where he could only stand upright and could not turn his body. The van had driven across the length and breadth of the town, visiting every prison in turn, making its collection of prisoners. The sight of the sunlit streets and of the people in their spring clothes, gesturing freely, had moved him indescribably. The feeling that he was cut off from everything had then been overpowering. He had stared out through the wire mesh as though he must not miss a single movement of those free people, must not allow a single ray of light to escape him. Afterwards, alone in his cell, he had examined carefully his own reflection in the bowl of cold, thin tea. And then he had experienced a curious sensation of pity: it was as if he were feeling sorrow for some other person, not for himself.

He replaced the coffee, which had a stale smell, and picked up Stetten's letter. The professor wrote at regular intervals, every other day. In each letter he urged Doyno to rejoin him without delay, and in each he gave him a detailed description of his grand-daughter, Agnes' activities, what she had said and the progress she had made. In this one he wrote:

Agnes has just said this of you: you keep your eyes closed because you are ashamed of yourself. She wishes to know why. And it is true that since your return from Paris you frequently sit with your eyes shut. Thanks to the cleverness of Agnes we now know the reason for this. And also why you have withdrawn again into some squalid hotel room, and why you choose to run about the streets in the intolerable heat of a Viennese summer, sweating the sweat of the poor, and never even treating yourself to a ride on a tram. You are living a life of shame and penitence. I have taught you the names of countless gods. Do you know the name of the god for whose sake you are atoning? Please inform me of same by telegram.

In three days time we shall be at the station to meet you at 3.15 p.m. I have become accustomed, after decades of practice, to waiting for you in vain, but Agnes you must not disappoint. By so doing you would, for the first time, really hurt.

Your old Stetten

This had recently become his method of imposing his will; he would involve the authority of his grand-daughter, Agnes.

Doino pulled out the rucksack and the old trunk from under the bed. There was the rope, the crampons, the climbing boots, the special maps on which every ascent was clearly marked. There too was the little book, bound in dark blue linen, in which he had noted down the details of each of his climbs, the date of departure, the intended length of the excursion, the time spent on the climb and on the descent, the name of his companion. This latter was almost always the same, at first simply the surname, Gerner, later just the Christian name, Leopold.

Many of the facts here noted down recalled exact impressions as he thumbed his way slowly through the pages of the little book. Detailed incidents and scenes came back to him: a pause for rest before climbing up a chimney of rock, a nap on a high and level prominence, Leopold's green-and-grey checked stockings.

His memory of their first, fortuitous encounter was equally vivid. It had happened one stormy dawn in a mountain hut, and for the whole of that day it had been impossible to venture outside. It was about a year later that Leopold had told him he was lost: he had forged his uncle's signature. It was a tragic tale, connected with an abortion. Everything threatened to collapse; he would be unable to complete his studies; he would have to give up the girl he loved; this was the end of everything. . . .

Now, thinking back about that business, it was inconceivable to Doino how he had managed to put everything to rights so easily: there

had been the money to find, the famous lawyer, the doctors who, out of friendliness, had signed the certificates which were essential to the solution of the problem. Today, fifteen years older, incomparably more experienced and probably cleverer, he would hardly dare tackle such an undertaking. He felt an amazement approaching envy for the triumphant youth he had once been.

Still, all the same, Leopold had been basically uninteresting. One could entrust oneself to him when dangling by a single rope above an abyss, but one could hardly imagine Leopold at one's side behind the barricades. For such as him one could feel sympathy but not friendship. Doino's path had lain clear before him; his had been the bridge that did not exist, but that came into being with each step that he took into the future. A man who had chosen such a path must forget the people who stand on firm ground.

He put everything back into the rucksack, repacking it carefully as though he would soon have to hoist it on to his shoulders once more. But never again would he need that rope, those climbing boots, all these objects which alone remained unchanged.

He opened the little trunk: letters, photographs, notebooks. Why had he left them behind here? Why had he not taken them with him, or burned them? He picked up a bundle of letters and then dropped them again. He disgusted himself—he was like some faded old woman at the end of her last, her ultimate love affair. Period 1880. Letters on the tables, on the overstuffed armchairs, and now she sits down at her piano and plays from memory a Chopin nocturne, but too slowly, with a false emphasis, like a tepid, boring drizzle of rain.

With his foot he shoved the rucksack and the little trunk back under the bed. In a little while he would leave this place and would forget about them once again. The proprietress would notice them too late and would then once again become the self-appointed guardian of these fragments of the persistent past. Then the woman would die and her son-in-law would sell rucksack and contents, would glance through the letters with growing disappointment before burning them, would stare at the photographs, particularly those of young women in bathing suits, and then . . . Well, what would happen to the photographs? What would be their end?

A little booklet, a pocket diary, had fallen out of the trunk. He picked it up and glanced through its pages. Addresses, telephone numbers, the occasional title of a book, quotations. His handwriting had changed. It used to be bigger, more spacious and defiant, than it now was.

On one page were a few lines, perhaps a quotation from a conversation with Stetten:

There is no purpose in storming heaven, quite apart from the fact that you will not succeed in the attempt. But even if you did storm heaven, you would find it empty when you got there. If there is no other way of proving heaven empty than by storming it, then that is what we shall do. And once there we shall install a loud-speaker. And through our loud-speaker we shall broadcast the Missa Solemnis, but with an entirely new text. – I daresay. Whenever a great deed has been completed, it always becomes apparent that it only served to permit some such subsequent childishness.

On another page, in an unknown hand, round and laborious, a name: *Gusti Lahner*, followed by an address. And beneath it was written: *You will forget, I won't wait*, each word underlined separately.

The prophecy had been justified to this extent, that he had even forgotten his past forgetfulness. He examined the date in the hope that it might refresh his memory, for the name meant nothing to him. It had been a Saturday, September 18, probably some sort of party at a friend's home. The writing was that of a simple, sensuous person, probably some gentlewoman. And suddenly he saw the girl before him: bare and rounded shoulders, a round face, framed in long, darkly curling hair, laughing light brown eyes. That was she, that was Gusti Lahner. His memories now expanded of their own; he saw a big room with many armchairs upholstered in red, two black pianos in the centre, many candles by the windows that led out into the garden. Why candles? And why by the windows?

The man who had then been celebrating his birthday had afterwards gone abroad. He was an art dealer who had had enough of Europe and who wished to go to Tahiti, though in the end he had settled in California. Actually he was a composer, and long after midnight he could usually be prevailed upon to play his latest composition. 'I'll just sketch it in,' he would say with his anguished smile, and then he would play what he had composed and, later, what he would have liked to compose. Only towards dawn, when nobody was listening to him any longer, would he give up. Then each guest had to tell him quite definitely that he had not really played his composition, that he had only sketched it in. He paid court to all women; it was said that he was homosexual but that men frightened him. Perhaps at that time he had been wooing Gusti Lahner, which was why she had been there. For she did not otherwise fit in very well.

Her long curls fell down to her breast. For a moment Doino was not

certain whether it was really this Gusti whom he was now remembering or whether it was not an advertisement which he had frequently seen in the windows of a perfume shop when he was a child. The shop had adjoined that of an antique dealer whose display he had gone to look at once a week.

This doubt both amused and bothered Doino. Memory should not be allowed to play such deliberate and confusing tricks. Of course, it was always possible that the reason the girl had appealed to him so strongly on that 18th of September was simply the fact of her close resemblance to the advertisement. But had he known that at the time? Had he consciously realised it?

He became absorbed once again in the study of this sensually exciting handwriting. He murmured: 'You will forget, I won't wait'. Why was it that he could not recall her voice? And then he remembered that she was the girl who had hardly spoken a word – yes, that was she. Now it was all quite plain. The memory was in his finger-tips, as though he had just this moment touched her face, her shoulders, her breasts. And the wonderful way she had smelt, he could remember that exactly, she had smelt of sunshine. He had doubtless thought this at the time, but now he asked himself what he could have meant by the phrase: she smelt of sunshine.

It had been a night of endless tenderness—neither love nor passion, but tenderness. It was she who had created it, needless to say, not he. It had probably not even been intended for him.

He stood up, concerned. Was he not now seeing himself in a new light? Were there many such patches of darkness in his consciousness? A person, for no reason and without conditions, had presented him with this world of tenderness, yet when the night was passed he had forgotten all about it. It was irrelevant whether she whom he had thus forgotten had waited for an hour, a day, or a week. It was something else, far more important. No man has any right to live unconsciously.

He packed his case. The servant would forward it. All his other possessions were already with Stetten.

He hardly slept, rose early, and set off in search of Gusti Lahner. The old address proved useless. Gusti had had a furnished room in the apartment of a Frau Huber, a widow. This lady had moved, some six years before, and the manageress of the building did not know whither. He asked a junior official at the Commissariat of Police, already at this early hour weak from exhaustion, to let him have her new address from the register. Even so it was no easy matter finding the widow, for she had meanwhile remarried and thus had a new name. But when found she

did remember Gusti, because of the unusual way in which she had lost her as a lodger. She referred to her as 'the girl who committed suicide'. Fräulein Lahner had had a fiancé, an Italian. He had been a fine gentleman, who had wanted to marry her, but unfortunately his divorce had not been quite completed. All the same they were for all intents and purposes engaged. One night, it was in the spring, the young lady had thrown herself into the Danube, not far from the Reichsbrücke. 'And she was wearing round her neck a valuable string of pearls, given to her by her fiancé only a few days before. That struck me as most extraordinary. A girl has to be really desperate before she'll jump into the water with a string of pearls round her neck. It might easily have resulted in a misfortune.' In any event they had pulled her out and taken her to hospital. There was nothing wrong with her, though they'd had to keep her under observation, because of her mental condition as they called it. But she'd never returned to her old room, perhaps she'd have felt embarrassed in front of the other lodgers.

He next went to the Central Information Office of the Police Department, paid a special fee and thus had only to wait for an hour and a half. Gusti's name was no longer Lahner but Torloni. He discovered that she lived in the part of Vienna called Hietzinger Cottage. She had a semi-detached house surrounded by a small garden. There was no answer when he rang the bell. Nor were the next door neighbours at home. He walked back to the street and waited. After some two hours an old servant-woman appeared who willingly answered his questions. They had all gone to the country for the summer, and she had been left behind to look after the house. Herr Torloni was in Italy, and Frau Torloni, she knew, had gone to a spa. He thought it was called Selzbad, but was not quite sure if she had got the name right.

He jumped on to the train just as it was pulling slowly out of the station. The conductor informed him that he would have to change trains and that this involved a five-hour wait, since there was no connection to the little spa in the early afternoon. However, if he was lucky, he might be able to cover the fifteen odd miles in some other fashion; for example, he might get a lift from a delivery van. As he got off the train a man came up to him and said softly, as though this were the end of a long conversation:

'You see, comrade, three years ago we were fighting here, fighting for our very lives it seemed. Well, they won, those others, and they govern like half-wits – and now what's going on? Nothing. Just as if nothing had ever happened. It's summertime, the people spend their holidays in the country, the young ones sunbathe on the beaches.

Everything's just the same. They condemned me to fifteen years in jail by default. I live illegally.'

Doino had no recollection of ever having seen him before, but the man had already climbed up into the train, nodded a farewell greeting through the open door, and disappeared.

At the hotel opposite the station they advised him to wait for the connection, since there was seldom any other way of getting to Selzbad. He did not wish to wait, it would be too late, he would not reach Selzbad before nine o'clock, and he had to join Stetten the next day. He therefore set off. On the road he was overtaken by a motor cyclist who gave him a lift on the pillion, though only for four miles. There the motor cyclist took the left fork, while Doino must take the right-hand, cross-country road for Selzbad. Doino did not have to wait long at the road fork before an open truck picked him up. It began to rain, lightly at first, but soon developing into a regular cloudburst. The road was flooded. They were still some three miles from Selzbad when the truck broke down. The driver took shelter at an inn, and Doino continued on foot. He was by now so thoroughly soaked through that he had nothing more to fear from the rain. While he thus walked on, an object of amazement to the people watching from behind closed windows, he thought how he had almost forgotten the object of this expedition and how, in any case, it was a foolish one. It was like the old days, when he was involved in an 'action'; once started it had to be completed. Only when that had been done was it the proper time to start asking questions. For example, whether the results achieved had been worth the expenditure of energy. As justification it is customary to invoke an idea, even though there is nothing on earth that is so sure a refuge from ideas as action. The magic of action is that everything which is not directly of use vanishes into a sort of mist. It makes the most violent rebel into an obedient soldier, prepared to march to the ends of the earth once he had made the principle of the action his. He tells himself that when it is completed he will become a rebel once again, for the activists always believe in an afterwards.

The downpour was decreasing in strength. Doino stopped, wrung out his coat, his socks, his tie. The bread in his pocket had degenerated into a soggy lump which fell apart when he took it out. He crumbled it between his fingers and dropped the crumbs along the edge of the road. He waited for the birds, but they did not come.

Now the sun broke through the scattering clouds and the strip of blue sky grew rapidly; it was as though a second day were dawning after a premature night. In Selzbad the waiters were busily setting out the

chairs and the big umbrellas in front of the coffee houses, as they did every morning. It was five in the afternoon and the day was drawing slowly to its close. Doino put on dry clothes in the big shop opposite the Kurhaus. He then crossed the street. He examined the list of persons taking the waters, a rather dirty and slightly smudged list, but the names were nevertheless quite legible. It was not until he reached the fourteenth sheet that he found the name he was looking for: 'Torloni, Maria Augusta, occupation nil, Vienna'. She had arrived three weeks before and was staying at the Hotel Edelweiss. On page sixteen he found: 'Torloni, Wilhelm-Guglielmo, industrialist, Vienna.' At the hotel, Doino learned that Herr Torloni had only come for a week-end and that his wife, who had gone on an outing to visit the famous old mill, would soon be returning to the hotel since dinner was about to be served.

He sat down on the terrace, near the main entrance. The action was for all intents and purposes completed, since he had found this woman who meant nothing to him and who would probably not even share that single memory because of which he had been travelling since early morning. On account of a certain Torloni – who had not quite finished obtaining a divorce – she had, one spring evening, thrown herself into the Danube with an expensive string of pearls about her neck. Now she was married to this same Torloni and was actually engaged in taking a cure at Szlzbád, where the waters were effective against rheumatism, gout, laryngeal maladies and, last but not least, according to the prospectus, certain chronic feminine troubles. Gusti probably had no children and devoted all her tenderness to the industrialist, Guglielmo Torloni.

He moved his basket-chair slightly, so that he might obtain a direct view of the hotel guests' faces as they returned. Even though he had no clear visual memory of the girl of September 18, he still could remember the advertisement in the perfume shop.

'Oh, I see,' said the waiter, suddenly, from behind his chair. 'You're not personally acquainted with Frau Torloni. I must say I was surprised you didn't speak to her when she went by just now with her friends. Her handbag even brushed your chair. She's the lady with the bright red hair, the one who laughed, you must have noticed her!'

He had noticed her, the woman who had laughed. She had laughed the way primitive women sometimes do when they have been without a man too long. Had he been leaning forward she would have touched him with her elbow as she passed by.

The waiter was good-natured and gave him a small table opposite the

one at which Frau Torloni took her meals. She was the last person to enter the dining-room and was wearing a necklace, but not of pearls. She ate with a hearty appetite and carried on an animated conversation with her neighbours, a baldheaded man and a faded woman.

She wore her hair in an elaborate style, back off her forehead. Hers was a wide face, not ugly, perhaps even beautiful, but her eyes were too restless, as though always searching for something which for ever eluded them. She had the standard snub nose of the Viennese 'pretty girl', a stupidly made-up mouth, a proud chin, cheeks that were overfull. When she raised her hand the loose sleeve of her dress fell back to reveal a handsome, tanned arm. She raised her hand too frequently.

There was a train at ten o'clock which would take him to the junction whence he could travel south. If he caught it he would be sure of being punctual for his meeting with Agnes and Stetten. He had plenty of time and he remained where he was. She did not leave with her neighbours; the waiter brought her a glass of water into which she shook some yellow powder.

When he came over to her table she looked at him with amazement, raised her hand, and pushed the curls back from her forehead. He said: 'At the party given by Guttman, the art dealer, just before he left, at his villa, on September 18. . . '

'Did you know Rudi? Does he ever write to you? I haven't heard from him for simply ages.'

When pronouncing certain consonants her tongue would make a clicking sound against her teeth. This produced an effect which was not so much ridiculous as surprising, since it did not suit her appearance. He went on, as though he had not heard what she had said:

'I met you there, I think. Your name was Lahner, Gusti Lahner.'

She gazed first of all at his hands, which rested on the back of the chair opposite hers, then she raised her eyes to his face, and they lost their restlessness. And he, looking back at her, discovered again the young girl he had known, and he was touched. When he noticed her blush he gently raised her hand and kissed it. She stood up, looked him in the eyes once again, and asked:

'You haven't come here because of me? No, what a stupid question, of course you haven't!'

She led the way as he followed her out on to the terrace.

'I remember everything. I know you are called Faber. But I've forgotten your first name. Forgive me.'

'Doino.'

'Doino, of course. Is it not strange that I should have forgotten it?

And it's easier to remember than Rudi.' She blushed again. 'I just said Rudi as . . . as an example. And your address, too, I remember that. But I don't suppose you live there any more.'

'Yes, I still live there.'

'Incredible!' She had of a sudden become restless once again. 'Incredible! I once sent you an express letter. It was terribly important. I waited and waited, but you never came.'

'I've only been living there again for the last four weeks. I've been away for many years, abroad. I've travelled a great deal.'

She laughed now, the laughter of a child who has realised that what seemed frightening was in fact only a joke.

'Of course, that's what I told myself later on. It wasn't possible. If you'd been there you'd have come, wouldn't you?'

'Why did you turn to me at that time? We only knew each other for one night, for a few hours.'

He waited in vain for an answer. She was playing with the catch of her handbag, opening it and snapping it shut again. He showed her the page from his diary.

'During that night I think you hardly said a word, but you wrote this. I found the diary, by accident, yesterday. That is why I am here.'

'That is why you are here? But why are you here? Who are you really? You say you've travelled a great deal. Who with? Why?'

'You must know who I am. It was to me and not to anybody else that you sent the express letter.'

'I asked you to help me, because that night I was convinced that you were the best person I had ever met. You didn't love me, I didn't love you, but nobody has ever been so tender to me as you were. That is why I've always thought about you whenever I've been unhappy.'

'What you've just said, about goodness and tenderness, do you really believe that?'

'Of course. It's true.'

He leaned forward, gripping the arms of his chair, and said in a harsh voice:

'It's not true. All the goodness and all the gentleness came from you. You gave. I only took.'

She placed her hands on his, as though she must soothe him, and said:

'Be calm. You don't understand. Or you've forgotten. I thought even then that you were bound to forget quickly. And you haven't answered my question. Why are you here?'

'To punish myself for having forgotten. And to thank you.'

She shook her head.

'Funny things happen in life, very funny things. It's too bad I can't tell Torloni about it, but he always gets so frightfully upset. He knows perfectly well that I've had an occasional flutter. But he'd rather not talk about it. How long are you here for?'

'I had intended to catch the ten o'clock train tonight, though I can hardly make it now. I'll leave tomorrow morning.'

She had a car and she drove him that night to a station on the southern line. When they arrived there she decided that it was too late for her to return to Selzbad alone, so they spent the rest of the night together.

'Just a little flutter,' she said. 'And besides, I want you to tell me what you do exactly and whether you're happily married.'

He was awakened by the first rays of dawn. He raised himself on one elbow and looked at her. She was utterly relaxed in sleep and yet her face seemed full of suffering. That might be the effect of the half-light. The girl who committed suicide, that was what the widowed Frau Huber had called her. She had wished to die because Herr Torloni had hesitated to marry her. And because the 'best person' was not there to stop her. The express letter, that was to have saved her no doubt, still lay in the little trunk, unopened. The son-in-law of the proprietress would read it in due course, should he happen to come across it when he inherited the property.

She had told him the secret of why she had not spoken: she had not wished him to notice at once that when she spoke her tongue clicked against her teeth. He had not noticed it.

Just before he boarded his train she said:

'You've still told me nothing about yourself. But, it doesn't matter. I know the most important thing.'

'Which is what?'

'That you're unhappy and that you haven't yet learned how an unhappy person has to behave.'

The train began to move slowly off. She added hastily:

'It will all be much easier when you've learned that.'

She waved her left hand. With her right she pushed the curls back from her forehead. When he could no longer see her brown arms he settled back in his seat and opened his newspaper. On the front page he found a report of the latest trial, containing a summary of the more important accusations that the prosecutor had made. He felt his heart contract within him. Before reading on, he looked to see if there were not perhaps good news from Spain, but there was none. The prosecu-

tion had described the accused, old revolutionaries, as paid agents of the police, skulking traitors, the scum of the earth, poisonous reptiles. It seemed the loud-speakers were broadcasting his accusations throughout the land, on the streets and squares, in the factories, schools and barracks. Those who listened frequently shouted down the voice from the loud-speakers, screaming:

'Death to the traitors! Exterminate the reptiles!'

He knew it all, by heart, there was no point in his reading on, he knew every detail. Still, he read on. No, he had not yet learned how an unhappy person behaves. There was no way out save into nothingness.

CHAPTER II

FOR two nights and one day it rained without stopping. Then the sun shone again, but it was plain that summer was over. Stetten returned to the city with his grandchild, while Doino remained behind, perhaps for the whole winter if he so chose.

He now had the little, narrow valley, at the end of which stood the house, entirely to himself. All that broke the silence was the occasional sounds of falling stones, dislodged by the rapid movements of chamois, and, with decreasing frequency, the distant tinkle of a cow-bell. The valley was enclosed on three sides by stony mountains; it was easy to forget that the fourth side was open to a world no great distance away. Here was solitude both dumb and eloquent, and a man could engage in conversation with the surrounding peaks while yet remaining alone.

Once a day, generally towards evening, the postman came. Doino only opened his letters in order to make sure that they contained no news of Djoura or Mara or Albert. He read no letters any more save those from Stetten, and he wrote none at all. He would spend his morning waiting for the evening, and the night waiting for the new day. Once a week he made his way down to the village to buy his provisions. Then he would sit down at the inn which was near the school, until the hour when the children sang. He did not leave till they had finished. In the evening, sitting with his eyes closed, he could hear the children's voices again. Once a child had sung a French song, a song about a little bird that had fallen from the dead branch of an orange tree and had hurt itself and had died. In his dream he saw a long, sad face, turning this way and that, as though to warn him, and singing:

Jamais de la vie, je n'en reviendrai, je n'en re . . . à la volette, je n'en . . . à la volette je n'en reviendrai. He awoke then and stared for a long time into the darkness as if, in the surrounding blackness, he might find his murdered friend. Vasso was with him in so many forms and spoke to him with so many tongues.

It was several weeks before he made up his mind to open the chest. As he was leaving Stetten had said:

'When you feel like it, read the papers that I keep there. I've put in my will that they are to come to you after my death.'

He found many bundles, tidily arranged, each with its own label. He took out *Journal of a Voyage*. On the first page was written:

Today, the 2nd of July 1928, I am, for the first time in many years, once again setting off on a journey. I am going to find every person who took part in the last weeks of my Einhard's life. I am going to visit the place where the shell so utterly destroyed him that 'only his lower limbs could be buried'. Twelve years and eight months have passed since then, and they have brought me no consolation, the boon of forgetfulness has been denied me, and I have not even desired it. For this long time I have lived without my son; this long time I have been unable to live without my son.

Stetten had doubtless made meticulous preparations for his journey and had procured the names and addresses of the men who had been in Einhard's company. At that time he still drove a car. He had not told his wife nor Walter, his elder son, what was the purpose of his travels. He was gone from Vienna for close on three months, and during this time he made no attempt to communicate with them.

From the first few pages of the diary it was by no means clear what exactly it was that this man of fifty-eight had been looking for. Did he really believe that after so many years he could still learn something he did not already know from his son's comrades, men who by now were doubtless uninterested and apathetic? He, who in such strong terms had declared forgetfulness to be a common and dangerous evil, did he really think to glean evidence from the memories of indifferent persons? And evidence of what? And why so late?

The beginning of the journal was a bald record of disappointment. The men he visited either did not remember Einhard, or, if they did, their memories were confused and they could be sure of nothing. The foolish and the vain maintained that they recalled him exactly, but the details that they produced in such exaggerated abundance only went to show that they were mistaken, that they had confused him with another, or with several other people. One man even claimed to know

for a fact that Einhard had not been killed at all and, as proof of this, asserted definitely that he had run into him in a dance-hall at Graz in 1920.

Those were sad days and depressing nights for the solitary traveller. He noted with repeated amazement the gloominess of hotel bedrooms. He had decided to read nothing during his journey, not even the newspapers. Now he was *unarmed and at the mercy of the damp bedclothes and of the oppression that emanates from all these wretched objects about me: the half-rusty wash-basin, the greenish beard of the Saviour above the bed, the weak and flickering light, the fly-spotted electric bulb.*

And yet gradually the entries in the diary grew longer. There was less concerning memories of Einhard. Stetten began to fill pages with biographical details and descriptions of the way of life of the men he met. He would sometimes spend two or three days in one small village. He noted down fully the memories that these old soldiers retained from the war of ten years ago.

Like all the others, K. G. has retained an amazing amount of detail, all almost uniformly insignificant. Like them, too, he has forgotten the whole, the war itself. Never lose sight of this: human beings live in episodes, the beginnings of which they generally only notice too late. Life is an abstraction, as is war, and men do not live by abstractions. In this context, too, then, the writing of history necessarily involves a falsification of perspective. 'Equal pay, equal grub, and the war's forgotten years ago.' Exactly.

And quite soon the war itself ceased to be the theme of the journal. It was as though Stetten were for the first time discovering how simple people live, and he filled whole pages with descriptions of banal detail. One such description ended with the words:

No, life is not dramatic, but epic. Murderous war, epidemics, revolutions, they change nothing, they are fundamentally unimportant. What is important are inventions that alter the technique of daily life, that make it permanently easier. It is important whether you have to walk to the stream for your water, whether you have a pump in your courtyard, or whether you can turn on a tap in your house. In so far as the existence and true interests of the people are concerned, all great ideas, all works of art or of poetry are so much dried cowdung in comparison to the invention of the wheel. Do I belong to the people?

But then, in the sixth week of his journey, he came upon the blacksmith, Alois Furtner, in a Carinthian village. Furtner did remember the boy Einhard. Einhard had become attached to him, had always spoken to him as soon as he came back from a patrol, had even given him a photograph. Furtner still carried it with him. It was of Einhard at the

age of fourteen, and had been taken with his father during an outing which they had made together. In the background was a waterfall, the name of which was printed on the reverse: *The Dead Woman*.

Stetten noted down in full everything that the blacksmith told him, without comment. It was not quite clear what it was that had attracted the already mature Furtner to the seventeen-year-old boy. Einhard was physically courageous, but he suffered from everything he saw, perhaps even more from the irritating stupidity of military life than from the atrociousness of events. He was an ensign-cadet and thus in command of men often twice his age. And this was the first time that he had had to deal with the common people. Furtner made himself responsible for him and did not let him out of his sight.

'He was such a delicate young chap. After it happened, I often said to myself, he had to go because he was much too good for this world. Yes, that's the way it was. And then he often talked about you, Herr Baron, but you, perhaps you didn't bother about him enough. Maybe you didn't love him enough, that happens you know, without wanting to give offence, sir.'

'Did Einhard ever say that?'

'Not in so many words, but I could feel that's what he thought himself.'

Stetten spent some further six days in that village. He noted down many details. A few days later he wrote:

It is not even absolutely certain that I really loved Einhard.

He referred repeatedly, in the days that followed, to conversations that he had had with his son's friend, but always without comment.

Thanks to Furtner's precise indications he was able to find the spot where Einhard had been killed. He went there early one morning and remained until evening. Only a man who knew that trenches had once been dug here could still trace their last, faintest outlines. The earth had resumed its peaceful appearance and was now one with what lay buried beneath its surface.

The tree, for whose last leaf Einhard had felt such anxiety, has survived it all. I sat beneath its shade and, for the first time, could think of my child without sorrow. During those moments even the vision of the way he died no longer had the power to hurt me. It seemed to me then possible to reconcile myself with fate, with all fate.

Yet as evening fell and I was walking slowly down the road that led back to the village, I was once again aware that amor fati is a sacrilege against mankind. I will not accept fate.

In the entries he had made during his journey to Rome he reverted over and over again to this theme.

If men were deprived of their faculty of forgetfulness they would cease to tolerate any sort of oppression – no man is so lonely as he who refuses to forget. He who belongs to many ages is no one's contemporary.

A proud statement, Doino thought, but too large. Nobody can escape from his own age, and within his age no one can ever be truly alone. Stetten must have learned this too in the ten years that had passed since he had made that journey. That he should then have ignored Fascism – he referred to it only once, dismissing it as *a dreadful farce of epigones, a travesty of an old, played out tragedy* – that Stetten should travel in this fashion back into the past, these were of course themselves acts of 'forgetfulness'. A good memory is a superfluous luxury if it remains closed against the present.

During the course of that night Doino finished reading the diary, more from a feeling of duty than from interest. What Stetten had to say about Rome was in no wise new to one who was aware of the long and hostile intimacy in which the old historian had lived with the ancient world.

If the pathetic numbskulls could finally be deprived of their taste for tragedy, they might eventually grasp the fact that the greatness of Mediterranean civilisation lies in its having raised mankind to the level of comedy. There is only one way to send the doddering and dying gods packing, and that is to laugh at them. The Latin nations may stink of old age and over-ripeness; they are still the only young peoples in the world, since they quite frequently succeed in being less serious than beasts or gods. (The gods started their careers as totem-beasts, man began his with a smile.)

There were many such remarks in the diary, interspersed with quotations from archives, the titles of freshly published source material, brief references to accidental encounters.

The last few pages, on the other hand, were devoted to an elderly Viennese couple whose acquaintance he had made many years before and then completely lost sight of. He found them in Rome. And he gave a detailed description of their misfortunes. They had sent their only daughter to Rome, there to finish her artistic studies and learn Italian. She wrote regularly, and seemed contented, even happy. Then her letters began to arrive less frequently, and instead she sent them telegrams asking for ever larger sums of money. Finally even those stopped. Deeply worried, the elderly couple set off to find their daughter in this foreign country, but in vain. Stetten joined them in

their search, and it was he who finally located her. It was after all a foolish, but none the less deadly, love story; the clever, sensitive girl had fallen victim to a stupid seducer. This man had not known how to rid himself of her, for the usual tricks by which he manoeuvred women out of his life remained, in this case, unavailing, since the girl's belief in him was too great. So he took her off to Sicily and left her, one day, in a remote village, absconding with such money and valuables as she possessed. Even then the girl refused to accept his treachery. She thought that he was involved in some tragedy from which only she could save him. She wandered through Sicily, looking for him in the mountains to free him from the enemies she thought had captured him. When she could no longer close her eyes to reality, she attempted to take her own life. She did not immediately succeed. Stetten found her in a hospital in Catania. She died four days later.

The diary ended with this episode and with the journey home, on which Stetten accompanied her parents.

He hardly mentioned the father and had little to say concerning the daughter, of whom he wrote only in connection with her mother, whom he referred to first of all as Frau Gaby and later, simply, as Gaby. This had been the name given her by the poet Melchior, who had urged her to flee with him in poems that a second generation now quoted with almost reverential respect.

Stetten wrote:

Needless to say the little girl soon discovered that Gaby was her mother. And that for the sake of staying with a boring, hypochondriacal numismatist she had renounced a love, a glory of which she yet desired and tended. She had not wanted to love. The daughter therefore set out to compensate for this. It was not the jumped-up Italian actor who seduced her; it was Melchior's love poems that caused her death. And that, little girl, is no such evil matter. Millions of men have been sacrificed to the hollow phrases of half-educated shouters.

The last page was almost filled with Melchior's famous poem: *For you my Death will be no End*. It was plain to see that Stetten had fallen in love with Frau Gaby.

Feeling once again reconciled with his old teacher, Doino replaced the manuscript. Stetten would either have destroyed it or else completely changed its contents at a later date, had he wished to guard against his own irony. He had set out to seek traces of his beloved son; he had once again found reason to doubt himself, and he had quickly forgotten this in order to fall, half seriously, half laughingly, under the spell of a woman now that it was too late, just because it so certainly was too late.

During the days that followed Doino pondered the question of whether the incident of Gaby's daughter did not contain a very real significance. His thoughts kept reverting to the half-starved, barefoot girl wandering through the villages of Sicily in search of her lover. She was intelligent, yet she employed her whole intelligence simply to crush the suspicions that inevitably and increasingly arose within her. How can one be done with a love that finishes thus, destroying the value of all that has gone before?

He had time to imagine her quest, to accompany her on her way. He knew her path by heart. And he knew that those who followed her along it, no matter how many of them there might be, would never meet anyone coming the other way. For it was too narrow; there was only room on that path for people going one way.

The snow began to fall, covering the trees and the rocky heights. The animals now moved silently, and the stillness of the valley was sometimes so complete that he felt constrained to hold his breath. Only now and then a branch, like one stirring in his sleep, would shake off its little coverlet of snow. The whiteness covered the earth like a bridal gown, not like a shroud. Or so it seemed to Doino, for, unawares to himself, a change was taking place within him. He was no longer alone with Vasso and their mutual past, since the dead girl, Ada, had joined their company. He became ever more conscious of her presence, as piece by piece he slowly reconstructed her life: her childhood, her youth, and then her end. He filled in this strange life with more and more detail, some simple, some strange. He gave her a face: her features were not quite regular, but together they were beautiful, grave with an extreme, impenetrable reserve, and sad, as the eyes of children are sometimes sad, when she gave herself up to an idea, a poem, a sonata, her seducer. He selected his words most carefully, and formed them into sentences as though he were about to commit them to paper; he would keep the fire burning in the stove until far into the night, for each evening he worked out a concert programme which he played on the gramophone. Every day now he went down into the village in order to hear the children sing. One day he spoke to their teacher and gave her a volume of music that contained the most beautiful of the old French Christmas carols. Should the melodies please her, he offered to translate the words. The young woman was friendly and she wished to prolong her conversation with the strange hermit. But he had had enough; he was already beginning to compose a fresh chapter: Ada's meeting with Melchior. He was anxious to be alone once more. In order to break off their talk, he said:

'You must be surprised at my coming so often to hear your children sing. It is because of a girl who died recently, and I . . .'

The schoolteacher interrupted him:

'Oh, I see. I quite understand now.'

She tried to fix his eyes with her own large, grey ones, and she pressed his hand as though to show that a special sort of understanding existed between them. When at last she turned away, Doino was thinking that it might even be possible to introduce himself into Ada's story: in Vienna, before her departure, say, or in Italy on some occasion prior to her meeting with the seducer. But all that lay far in the future; at present she was only just seventeen, it was an early summer's afternoon, she was driving to the station on the way to her first and only meeting with Melchior.

He also began to work again, not hard it is true, but regularly. He collected the material together which would provide the basis for his and Stetten's projected historio-sociological analysis of modern war.

Doino was getting better. Even the news from Spain was at this time not so bad; as the year drew to its close the Republicans had gone over to the offensive and had at last succeeded in capturing Teruel. He heard from Mara, only a message of greeting, but that was enough. And, indirectly, he received news of Djoura. The writer would be at liberty in six months' time, but would send a messenger even before then.

One morning, after a heavy fall of snow that had continued throughout the night, he had had to get out of the house through the kitchen window, since all the doors were blocked by drifts. He pushed open the shutters and suddenly the whole world was shining, glittering, shimmering with whiteness in sunlight of a serenity such as is usually only to be found in marvellous dreams. He leaped outside and then, turning slowly this way and that, examined the surrounding countryside over and over again with ever fresh eyes. It was a wonderful world, filled with gratitude: a world that existed simply, without heaviness, for ever held together by tenderness. He was almost reluctant to shovel the snow away from the door, for it seemed a violation.

Yes, his fall was surely over. The abyss was not bottomless after all, and now he could begin to climb back. In the house there were letters from his many friends throughout the world. Today he would write to them. There was so much to be done! He had once promised Djoura that no man is alone so long as he is not unfaithful to humanity, that eternal *débutante*. It was time to start anew.

In the days that followed, he realised that he was still a convalescent, threatened by relapses; the great courage of that snowy morning was soon exhausted, though it never quite disappeared. Doino began to write letters, to prepare for his return to Vienna and to life, but he kept

postponing the date of his departure. He was afraid of encountering those friends whom he had himself brought to the movement. How hard it would be, and how fundamentally tedious, to explain to them why he had left. Only a few would follow him, while many would break their friendship in implacable bitterness. His own past rose up before him to invalidate the words that he must say to those friends. It was not so long ago, scarcely more than half a year, since he himself had answered a sad and desperate man, Albert Gräfe, during one undarkened night in Oslo, with the question: 'And what are we to offer them? Your loneliness? My loneliness?'

And so he hesitated. Already the snow was more like a shroud than a bridal gown.

Finally there came an urgent summons from Stetten. He could no longer delay. He dragged his case on a child's sled into the village and from there the grocer took it to the station. He himself went on foot, walking very slowly; it was though he might thus still delay his departure. In the train he tried to think out another chapter of Ada's life; he did not succeed. That tenderness was only a rapidly fading memory. He was filled with fear at the prospect of a return to life.

Once again he sat with his eyes closed.

CHAPTER III

DURING the last few years Stetten had completely lost all desire to write. He reckoned that in the whole world he might count about one thousand serious readers – assuming that his writings appeared in at least three languages. He had published a great deal, including fourteen thick volumes in which he had propounded the lessons learned from his studies of the past. But meanwhile everything against which he had fought had simply gained in strength until now it seemed invincible. No sooner did he oppose some current but it swelled to a torrent, brushing away all obstacles in its headlong rush. To predict without being able to prevent should have become an anguish, yet Stetten scarcely suffered from this at all. He was protected by a deeper, all-embracing scepticism; for he had decided that final defeat is as illusory as final victory. Though error may be mortal, truth is not. If he did not utter that truth today, some other would do so in ten or fifty years time, and it would be all the riper for the delay.

At night, during the hours that he spent in his grandchild's nursery listening to the sleeping girl's light breath, he was frequently overcome, as it were, by hope – hope for that generation which now existed as little children like Agnes. They would survive the approaching tidal wave, they would understand what had happened, they would finally create that fine community to which he had wished to belong. He was sixty-seven years old, and he had had two sons. Einhard, the younger, had been killed in action at the age of seventeen; Walter, the older, had been silly, like most men of this age; he had joined the movement of the national corruptors and they had murdered him, by mistake. The mother of those two dissimilar sons had shared and encouraged the elder's folly and had suffered a frightful expiation. There was left to him only his grand-daughter. And of his countless pupils just one remained. This one pupil had tried to burn at both ends and now, it seemed, he had burned himself out.

Stetten had turned against music after Einhard's death, but now he was reconciled to it once again. Agnes was to study the piano and, later, the 'cello. He had bought a car so that she might be driven out into the country. The child was to learn at an early age to love leaves and grasses, the blue sky and the passing clouds. In her consciousness nature was to be connected with her grandfather. He had not much time left and he was determined to win a place in her memory. He took trouble not to appear too old in her eyes. He dyed his moustache once again, and shaved early each morning so that she might never see the white stubble on his chin. He was small and delicately built, and thus could still move easily, almost youthfully. And it was a great joy to him to discover that the little girl liked his high, white forehead, and that his blue eyes, when he put aside his spectacles, pleased her.

One night he was suddenly filled with an anguished longing to live, so that he need not leave the child alone. A few hours earlier he had read the first detailed reports of the bombing of Guernica. And he had been overwhelmed by the prospect of his little girl being left without protection in a world where lies had assumed such power that they could transform themselves into steel and fire. Guernica, far away in the land of the Basques, was an unutterably atrocious but still only very small example of what was going on. Stetten lived in the consciousness that a war of global proportions was drawing ever closer. He must not die and leave the child alone. The child was first of all his beloved little grand-daughter, but she was also more than just herself. Mankind, too, was a child, harmless and dangerous at the same time, hastening towards each new peril, creating them for itself. He wanted to live for a further

ten or fifteen years, to be with Agnes, with Faber, and with this appalling and unspeakably miserable epoch.

It did not occur to him to intervene. He had tried to do so on one occasion with a purpose that was far from grandiose: he had wished to save the life of a single man. He frequently recalled that day, and the night in the prison, and finally the conversation with the prelate; on that February morning the prelate had refused the help he asked to save one poor man from the gallows; instead he had offered him only the knowledge that he, Stetten, was to blame for everything, and that his, Stetten's, life had been as senseless as the hours of the night just past, as the wasted effort of this plea for help.

Four years had passed since then, and now he summoned Doino to rejoin him with all urgency. For he wished to consult with him whether or not he should not intervene again. The danger was increasing daily; at any moment the Germans might occupy the country, for the government that had emerged victorious from the civil war of February 1934 had proved itself to be too weak. Hated and despised by the workers whom it had conquered, the Austrian Nazis were undermining it with the weapons of subtlety and violence. It was only a matter of days, perhaps weeks, certainly not more than months, before the evil prophecy by which Stetten had then thought to warn the minister must be realised.

This was clearly the time to leave the country, to take himself and his people to a safe place. And then, quite unexpectedly, that same prelate had come to see him, apparently not on his own initiative, but, equally apparently, not against his will. Without any lengthy preliminaries, and without referring at all to their previous and so far unique meeting, he had made it plain to Stetten that their beloved country, with all its ancient values both spiritual and intellectual, was in danger, a danger that though deadly, was yet not unavoidable. The members of the government, not all of them, alas, but almost all, were prepared to make sacrifices. The problem now was to bury old hatchets, to unify all the forces of good and to rebuild the government. Stetten symbolised liberalism in his person. Belonging to no political party, yet filled with a loving understanding of the working class (had he not given the strongest evidence of his sympathies during those unfortunate February days?), a man at the same time above all reproach, in a word a true Austrian of whom all who loved Austria must be proud – was not Stetten the man of the hour? Could he, had he the right to, continue to remain quietly on the sidelines, as he had always done up to now?

Monsignor Graber's flattery was misplaced since it was not up to the

level of vanity of the man to whom it was addressed. In friendly though firm words Stetten put his visitor right and advised him to speak more soberly. Who, he asked, had actually sent the prelate to see him, and with what authority was he endowed? What concessions were they prepared to make to the socialists, now that it was almost too late to make any? And what were they planning to do about those traitors to their country who had been raised to the highest positions in the land, who had been appointed ministers? He hoped that nobody was proposing to offer him honours in the name of those men who had lost all true sense of honour, who had emasculated their country and who had robbed Austria of its last powers of resistance. And what was the rôle of the Church to be? The Church must bear the ultimate responsibility for saving a state that it had made its own in those days when, with clerical approval, Vienna was crushed.

The prelate admitted that he was not in a position immediately to answer concrete questions. He had come simply to feel out the ground. He would now leave the professor, satisfied that the latter would close neither his ears nor his heart to his country's cry for help.

'What do you advise, Doino? Should we leave at once, this week? Or should we stay until the end and attempt to do what the prelate proposes?'

'You haven't yet taken a formal decision, but you know quite well that you've already made up your mind. Your actions will have hardly any effect, but they will make sense if, as a result, the defeat is less contemptible.'

They were seated in the big room that Stetten had furnished for Doino – it had at one time been Stetten's conjugal bedroom. Doino had still not had time to unpack his valise. In a few hours the negotiations were to begin again, and this time the prelate would not come alone. The professor was therefore anxious that his old pupil, who had for many years been involved in politics, should quickly give him the distillation of his experience.

'You're quite right. I have made up my mind to do what I can, and I'm reckoning on your support. But is the defeat really inevitable? Is it now in fact only a question of making it less contemptible?'

Doino hesitated before reply, while the minutes ticked away. Did not the old man already know everything that there was to be said? The dictates of reason were, on this occasion, unanswerable; they should leave the country immediately, since what threatened could not be prevented. There would be no fighting, but simply a spectacle; and then the huge destructive machine would come into action and would

function with perfect smoothness. That Stetten should wish to intervene, now that it was too late, was in no way remarkable. It accorded with his temperament and, indeed, with many of his ideas.

'No, I don't believe the workers will fight. They remember February '34 all too clearly and the demoralisation of unemployment has lasted too long. Why should they shed their blood? Be that as it may, you must insist on the following points at once: in the first place the Socialists and Communists must be freed from the prisons and the camps, since among those men are the only people worth dealing with; in the second place, all those ministers and officials who have been gambling on a Nazi victory, or at least who haven't been frightened by the idea of one, must be imprisoned; in the third place, the trades' unions must be re-established; in the fourth place, the workers' parties must be made legal again, together with their newspapers; in the fifth place, the *Schutzbund** must be legalised and armed. If the gentlemen you are to see refuse a single one of these points, or if they even hesitate, Professor, then you must immediately withdraw from the whole business.'

'It's not only the workers. They're a minority,' said Stetten thoughtfully.

'Quite. But the lower middle class is Nazi, the peasants don't care, and the officials, the police, and the army follow the example of God, they're on the side of the big battalions. Hitler's conquered them already. And what's happening in Spain every day is proof enough that he's got nothing to fear from the great powers of Europe.'

'If you are convinced that what you've just said is true, then I won't negotiate with them at all.'

'You will, Professor. You know that as well as I do. You are being offered power at the precise moment when that power is impotent. And that is the very reason why you will accept it. This paradoxical epilogue to your career will not make your work any less valuable; the effect of contrast will be all the more impressive since the penultimate paragraph must inevitably be a tragic one. You will die a violent death and around your broken neck they will hang a placard reading: *I, Baron Erich von Stetten, am unworthy to be a German. I betrayed my Führer and my country.* Such will be the justified fury of the populace that no doubt in their anger some of the longer words will be misspelt.'

They both laughed, Stetten even more heartily than Doino.

'When I was first married I used to sleep in this room. Happily for a

*The para-military organisation of the Austrian Socialist Party, outlawed after the civil war of 1934.

while, in love, occasionally jealous. From time to time I even contemplated challenging young officers to duels or dying an early death. Not seriously, you understand, but enough to impress the young woman to whom they paid court. Why have I brought that up now? Oh yes, the placard around my broken neck. Must I prepare to undergo torture?’

‘No man can know for certain how he will react to torture. The humblest and the proudest have probably the greatest chance of standing up to it. In any case, it’s no true test, since it really proves nothing. The truly decisive moment comes when you are led through the streets, shoeless, in a torn shirt and underpants, pushed, continually knocked down, spat on so that your persecutors’ spittle runs down your face, over your forehead and your cheeks, into your eyes: that is the decisive moment, for then you must utterly despise someone and it must be either your torturers or yourself. In the latter case, it is you who are the victim. Torture does not change a man in his being, it simply tests his ability immediately to overcome the most extreme pain and the most frightful humiliation, his ability to over-compensate.’

‘I understand, Dion. Say no more, I understand,’ Stetten was unusually moved. ‘Now be so good as to dictate the five conditions to me. I shall not avoid the test.’

The negotiations dragged on for days and then for weeks. It is true that some of the prisons were opened and a number of men were freed from the camps, but Stetten’s essential requirements were not fulfilled. Some thought that the time was not yet ripe, others that it was already too late. The fact that these men were well aware of the weakness of their position was not in itself a bad thing, but their timidity was ever greater than their weakness.

‘Granted that only mediocre men can form a good government; the vital question that arises is whether, in an unusual situation, the mediocrities are brave men or cowards,’ Stetten remarked.

‘These mediocrities of yours have invented a curious slogan. “Red, white and red until death!” It sounds all right, I suppose, but it’s hardly likely to attract people who are not particularly keen on dying. They’d rather shout *Sieg Heil!* That slogan has everything, just because it means nothing.’

‘Listening to you, my dear Faber, I find it hard to avoid the impression that none of this affects you any more. Indeed, it seems to me that you are perhaps even deriving a certain secret satisfaction from a disaster in which you yourself will be the first to be sacrificed.’

'You may be right, Professor. Don't forget that I'm a man of the Old Testament. The people who clambered to power over the corpses of the Viennese workers are about to be pushed aside by even fouler assassins. Europe will be a passive spectator and therefore an accomplice, and as a result will have to pay with its blood. Day after day, night after night, we bellowed into the ears of the world, telling them what was in preparation up there. What could now be avoided by the use of a modicum of courage will tomorrow let loose a world war. The day Hitler enters Vienna a trial will open in which world history will play the part of universal judge. And at that trial everyone will be found guilty, both those above the rubble and those beneath it.'

'Your attempts to synthesise Hegel and the Hebrew prophets have usually interested me, but here and now they strike me as somewhat out of place. A man, jumping with joy before his house in flames at the prospect of the bedbugs being roasted with the rest, has always struck me as a poor practitioner of the art of life, and I would further suspect him of being tinged with Marxism. We have always been fully in agreement about the desirability of destroying the bedbugs. But before tackling that job we must first get rid of the danger of cholera. Are you willing to help me try once more?'

Since his return from Prague Hofer had been living illegally. He held an important position within the Socialist Party, and Doino thus was able to find him within a few hours. He was calling himself Ferdinand Berger, and had set himself up as the representative of various foreign companies in a middle-class quarter of the city. He soon made it plain that he was well informed about the highly secret negotiations in which Stetten was taking part.

'I imagined at once that you must be behind it. Our comrade, Dr Rubin, told me about your close friendship with the professor, and about how he'd arranged for your release from the concentration camp. Well, you ought to have advised him better. He's dealing with traitors, with Hitler's future *gauleiters*.'

'If an agreement could be reached, those men could be neutralised at once.'

'Agreement with whom? With the enemy?'

'The first thing to do is to forget that February business. Hitler's the chief danger.'

'Comrade Faber, I'm sorry to have to tell you this, but you just don't understand. Our forgetfulness won't be enough to give those gentlemen the guts to fight. With the first shot that's fired they'll simply run

off and leave us in the lurch. I'm no Communist. For me the blood of the working class isn't just something to give a bit more colour to a political demonstration. So long as I hold the position I now have I'll see to it that not one drop of blood is shed in order to keep men in the government whose sole and solitary ambition is to save their own skins.'

'Do all your comrades feel the same way as you do?'

'Almost all. Listen, Faber, and listen carefully: we are not interested in being a party of dead heroes, we want to continue as simple, living men. Somehow we'll survive the war that's certainly coming, and then when it's over our party will creep up out of the ground again and will lead the working class to victory. You're smiling ironically, Faber. That's because you don't realise just how long-lived a thing is a people.'

During the next few days he met other leaders of the workers' party. He went to the mining district to visit old friends, courageous men, each one prepared to risk his life but none believing in the proposed alliance. One of them said to him: 'This is the winter sleep of conscience, and it can last a long time. We too must hibernate until these years are past.'

Doino let this man take him to the station. They walked up the stairs together, buffeted and almost held back by a violent, icy wind. The man said:

'We've got a lot in common, you and me. I too left the Communist Party a little while back. They kicked me out because of Heini Schubert, you must have known him, used to be in the youth leadership. In the February business he fought with the *Schutzbund*, and when they were beaten he managed to cross the border with a few others. He went to Russia from there, and for a couple of weeks they gave him a terrific welcome. As for us, we were all proud of Heini, the Socialists too, though he'd always been particularly hot against them. We all used to go to his mother's, to read his letters, I mean, and then one day there weren't any more letters. Seemed he'd become a counter-revolutionary, I mean he'd gone to the Austrian embassy in Moscow and asked for a pass back home, said he'd rather sit in an Austrian jail. Then at last there was another letter from him. He'd left Russia, he wrote, and was on his way to fight in Spain. There he had to join up with the Anarchists because of them not wanting him in the International Brigade. I mean they said he was a traitor. That's where he was killed in the end. You know, to say Heini was a traitor is like saying the sun doesn't shine in heaven but down at the bottom of a mine-shaft.'

'Why are you telling me all this, comrade?'

'First of all to explain to you why they kicked me out on Heini Schubert's account, because of my saying that if Stalin himself came to me and swore Heini was a traitor, I'd have told him he'd sworn a lie. And then, and then so as you'd understand what I mean about the winter sleep of conscience, that's what Heini himself wrote me, and it's the truth. In the old days I knew what it was I wanted, a Soviet world. But now, now that I know about the Soviets, now I just can't say any more what it is I want. I mean, you see, for the little bit what's left a man's not going to go getting his brains blown out. You see what I mean?'

'But if Hitler comes they'll put you in the German army and you'll get killed for . . .'

'No, Comrade Faber, that's something else again. When you've got to do something, you've got to do it. But when you've got a free choice and when it comes out as how you've chosen wrong – I mean the Russians, they wanted to pack Heini off to Siberia because he said the reason the workers lived so badly in Russia was because they hadn't got any rights at all. What I mean is this . . .'

The train drew in. As Doino opened the carriage door he said:

'What Heini Schubert said about the winter sleep of conscience was quite right. But that means that we individuals who are awake have got to be doubly on the watch. That is certainly what Heini meant.'

'Yes,' said the man, 'but wait a minute, listen, wait a minute.' However, the train was already moving off.

The train left. Doino was determined not to think any more about Heini Schubert and the comrade with his eternal 'I mean'. In order that he think of something else he opened the journal of the famous French writer. This was the second time that he had read it, and he still felt the same amazement that a man could, for decades on end, ignore the age in which he lived. But now the book did not hold his interest. Not for the first time was he conscious of the certainty that never would he be able to reverse the decision of choice that he had made when still a boy. Never would he be able to live as though the Heini Schuberts did not exist. He was bound to them by irrefragable links. Suffering did not break those links, it simply gave them the quality of an inescapable destiny.

For the last few days the negotiations had been broken off. The government had decided on a plebiscite; thus the Austrian people could show its threatening neighbour that the majority of the country was against

the *anschluss*. However, contact was maintained with Hofer and the unions. There could be no doubt that the workers, who were already beginning to demonstrate sporadically in the streets, would vote solidly against the Nazis.

Stetten had not stood up too well to the strain of those weeks; what he called his 'logical intolerance' had been too frequently provoked. He could not bear to hear men of mature age arguing as though knowledge and opinion, fact and assumption, were identical. He found particularly irritating those specialists who, so certain of their subjects in detail, proved themselves to be simply 'highflown adolescents' as soon as they began to draw general conclusions from the facts at their disposal.

'As you know, Dion, since the age of twenty-three I have been accustomed to people considering me arrogant. But when I am with those tepid mediocrities I am convinced that I have in truth always been humility itself and utterly without vanity. Do please turn off the radio. You can hear all about your defeats in Spain soon enough in the midnight news.'

'No. It's a question of the Barcelona arrests. If they condemn those innocent men it will be as bad as a military defeat. I missed the evening news from Catalonia. I'll try and get it on another station.'

He turned the dial very slowly. The apparatus was of extreme delicacy and the slightest move got a different broadcast. Bad music predominated. So many men had worked with devoted concentration for so many years to produce instruments with this certainty of tone. And now, through those instruments, the whole world could be made aware of one fact: never before in the history of man had poverty of mind been combined with poverty of feeling to produce an exhibition so provocatively discouraging of everything. The lyrics of the love songs might have been written by sly eunuchs, endowed with imaginations of unparalleled inferiority, working in a state of extreme exhaustion and picking their words at random from crossword puzzles. The melodies consisted of stolen tunes hacked about until they were well-nigh unrecognisable; they were well suited to the singers, whose ignorance of music was only equalled by their unconscious impertinence. In contrast to all this the instrumentation was astonishingly mature. A quite remarkable talent was there devoted to building huge, glittering pyramids from dirty pieces of paper.

This was another of the epoch's agonies, to be condemned, incidentally as it were, to listen to all this stuff. In less than five minutes, on long waves, medium and short, this box could impose on its listeners a

simultaneity that no human mind would willingly have envisaged, and to which it must yet sacrifice itself if it did not refuse the servitudes of the age. *But you, Lilou . . . my gorgeous pearl . . . 'cos you, Lilou . . . I love my girl . . . yes you, Lilou . . . Lilou just you-ou-ou.* The false tenor voice had such a repulsive tone that it might have been a ventriloquist singing. It was rewarded by tremendous applause. These enthusiasts would end up in the trenches or in concentration camps, and until their dying breath they would recall nostalgically these joys that once they had known: . . . *yes, you, Lilou . . . Lilou, just you-ou. . . .*

He turned the dial more quickly. *God save Austria!* And then, immediately, the voice of a French broadcaster. 'Those were the last words of the Chancellor. Austria no longer exists. Probably at this very moment the German armies are crossing the border. At this very moment the Austrian Nazis are marching through the streets of Vienna. They are massing outside the Chancellor's palace. Listen to a broadcast from Radio Vienna which we recorded less than five minutes ago.'

An enormous uproar filled the room. Thousands of voices must have been shouting in unison. *Ein Volk, ein Reich, ein Führer! Sieg Heil, Sieg Heil, Sieg Heil!*

'What . . . what is that?' Stetten had jumped to his feet and was holding out both hands towards the radio as though he were about to shake it, to bring it to reason.

Doino replied

'That is three hundred yards away from here. It seems that an hour and a half ago the Austrian Government decided that the business of saving their country was to be left to God. We're caught, like mice in a trap.'

He spoke calmly as if his words were of no further significance. Yet hardly had he uttered them when he felt an almost physical constriction, a tight, ice-cold belt around his body. Fear gripped him, and all he thought of was this sensation of being throttled which he only managed to shake off after a long moment of agony. Then he looked at Stetten. The old man still stared at the menacing box, shaking his head mechanically while his chin trembled, rising and falling of its own volition. This sight of the professor helped Doino pull himself together. Quickly he switched off the radio and said, in a voice intended to be reassuring:

'Actually we can hardly say it's a surprise. It's not absolutely too late. Let's work out what's to be done now.'

'Yes. Yes. I'm sorry. What did you say?'

Doino repeated his remark. This time Stetten understood. For a

moment he did not reply, as though sunk in a memory that took him far away, and then, as one waking from sleep, he said:

'We'll decide later. Now we must go out. We mustn't miss this. I have a duty to see it for myself, to be an eye-witness.'

The torches were visible from far off, flickering in the wet wind. The shouting began, again and again, hesitant at first and then swelling in volume until it became a furnace of sound. The people were now learning for the first time to behave as their 'brothers in the Reich' had been doing for five years.

As they came nearer they saw that it was a crowd of thousands. All the time more groups of people joined it. They were pressed shoulder to shoulder on the Ballplatz and overflowed into the Heldenplatz, before the Hofburg.

'How many cannon would you need to finish them all off?'

'None,' Doino replied. 'A few well-placed machine guns would do the job, or even thirty rifles. But look!'

A group of policemen were marching up in close formation. When they reached the ring of lights at the edge of the square the officer in charge gave the order to halt. He took something from his overcoat pocket which he fixed around his upper sleeve. It was a red arm-band, and the black swastika was plainly visible within the white circle. The men all followed his example before moving off again, towards the centre of the square. They were received with cries of *Heil Hitler!* The officer raised his arm in the Nazi salute and the shouting began again.

'Let us go, Professor. We have done our duty as eye-witnesses.'

'Wait, wait. Later on, when we're abroad, we'll need this memory as the only effective antidote to home-sickness. You have no idea how much I have loved my city until this moment.'

His voice broke and Doino quickly averted his eyes, for he did not wish to see the old man's tears. He took his arm and led him, resisting only slightly, down the cloisters of the Minoritenkirche. Silently and slowly they made their way home, while behind them the shouting went on with ever shorter intervals between the noise. It was like screams of voluptuous pain.

'We'll make our decisions tomorrow. Now I should like to escape into sleep. For a few hours I must forget that those people on the Ballplatz belong to the same race as myself.'

Doino wished to hold him back, to make it plain to him that these hours would not be offered them again, that they must leave at once since tomorrow would already be too late. But he said nothing. He was

becoming accustomed to the idea that he was lost. Fear dominated his thoughts, but it was no longer an intolerable anguish. He listened for tell-tale noises, for footsteps echoing from the street below. Even should he sleep, he would awake before dawn. For years hundreds of thousands of men had lived in just this state of mind—Russians, Germans, men of south-eastern Europe. Their faces might be those of men of free will, their gestures those of people who could still act, but they themselves were hunted animals. The circle of beaters and hunters was drawing ever closer about them, and never, for a single second, could they forget it.

He was awake when, after a short time, Stetten returned.

'Would you explain to me, Dion, why we are not getting drunk? Are we damned to see it all with clear eyes, to go through it with the agony of total consciousness? Come, let's drink.'

'No, it's no good to me. Alcohol doesn't help me forget. It just makes me uncomfortable and gives me a disagreeable sort of insomnia. Lethe water is for after death and not before. Since we're awake the best thing would be to clear this house at once.'

'Which means what?'

'Destroying all papers, no matter how old, which could compromise you or anyone else. That's always the first thing that has to be done under a dictatorship of this sort. It's not as simple as it sounds. If you tear them up and put them down the toilet the neighbours will notice the constant flushing; they'll guess what's happening and will run for the police. Burning them in the stove isn't a very good idea either, except in the sort of cold weather when smoking chimneys are not unusual. Besides, it takes too long. Every piece of paper has to be burned separately and the ashes broken up, because otherwise the charred manuscript will remain legible. Books can be thrown into the river, but again that's a tricky operation if you don't want to draw attention to yourself. Photographs are best burned on an open fire. . . .'

'You're talking in your sleep, Dion. Wake up!'

'No. Don't you realise that for years now those autodafés have been burning throughout Europe? Now, tonight, at this moment, thousands of persons in this very city are destroying their papers.'

'All right, all right. Here, drink.'

'Very well, but it will make no difference. Come, we shall burn your correspondence. We'll pack up your manuscripts and hide them somewhere.'

'Where?'

'That remains to be seen. In any case it will have to be in the house of some good Nazi or other.'

For a few minutes they stood in Agnes' room. Then they set to work. They were both exhausted, but they could not let the hours slip vainly by. A fog of filth was creeping over the land. It was time to 'clean up'.

CHAPTER IV

LEOPOLD opened the door, took half a step back, and then came forward again, saying:

'It's you, Faber - Doino I mean!'

Doino nodded, pushing gently past and closing the door behind him. They were now standing face to face in the ill-lit hallway. Leopold had aged, but the way elderly spinsters do; his features, instead of becoming more mature, had shrivelled. Perhaps this was why he wore ridiculous, reddish side-whiskers. He had every reason to be surprised by Doino's visit, but his grey eyes, permanently expressive of astonishment, were incapable of registering curiosity. The stoop of his shoulders underlined this impression.

'For heaven's sake, you could get into a lot of trouble here. Here in Austria, I mean, if you follow me.'

He still ended his remarks with that phrase. Doino did not reply.

'It's lucky that none of my . . . that no acquaintances of mine are here today, because otherwise . . .'

'Who's there, Leopold?' It was Hilde's voice, and she herself appeared at once. She went on: 'We'd better go into the bedroom, somebody might still come.'

She led the way and they followed.

'Good evening, Hilde, how are you?'

'We're quite well, thank you. But how about you? I suppose you want us to hide you. We've only got the one bedroom and the dining-room with the glass doors, and Leopold's little work-room next to the kitchen. He's got to keep that for correcting the children's exercises. He has to prepare his courses there too, and he can't be disturbed while he's doing that. So . . .'

'No, I haven't come to hide here. I'll be going at once. I just want you to look after a little trunkful of papers for me.'

'What sort of papers?' Leopold asked. He put on a pair of heavy,

black-rimmed spectacles, which Hilde had certainly bought him in order that he might appear less fatuous.

'Manuscripts of Professor Stetten's and of my own.'

'Very well. Bring them here,' said Hilde. Her manner was not unfriendly. 'We never drink after meals any more, since it prevents Leopold sleeping. But if you'd like to stay a little while I'll make a cup of tea.'

'Thank you very much, but don't bother on my account. I can't bring the manuscripts here; it would draw attention to me. I must therefore ask Leopold to come in a taxi and fetch them. Of course I'll pay for it,' he said, turning to Hilde. 'What with his Party badge and his Teutonic appearance he's got nothing to fear.'

'I'll do that willingly,' said Leopold. 'And if you would like to stay here for a bit – the question of space isn't really so difficult, if you follow me. Hilde, say something.'

'What can I say? Faber knows perfectly well that if he can't find anywhere else to stay, if none of his friends will put him up, he can always turn to us in the end – we'll look after him, at least for as long as we are able to.'

'For days now none of my friends has been sleeping in his own bed. A lot of them haven't even got one any more. A lot . . .'

'I won't discuss politics, I won't!' Hilde was almost shouting.

'Nobody's asking you to discuss politics. It's I who am talking about them, and I tell you . . .'

She covered her ears with her hands and now she was really shouting, as though a terrifying prospect had opened before her:

'I won't listen! I won't, Leopold, I won't!'

Her husband spoke up:

'You mustn't get us wrong, Doino. Of course I realise it's not easy for people like you just now. But we're having a pretty hard time too, if you follow me. We're not one hundred per cent Nazis, and therefore we can't absolutely approve of everything that's being done either, even though we realise it's all necessary. For example, take the couple on the second floor here. They're Jews, but all the same they're very respectable people. Late this afternoon they were brought down from their flat and made to scrub the paving stones out in the street. There were some young people there and, maybe just out of youthful high spirits, they got a bit rough with them. I didn't see it myself, but Hilde had to watch and had to take part in everything, if you follow me, because of her being a Party member and living in the same house and, well, that sort of thing affects a person's nerves. We're supposed to feel sorry for everyone else, but whoever feels sorry for us? Our nerves . . .'

'Why are you telling him all this? My God, I can't stand it!' Hilde was shouting again, and once more she clapped her hands over her ears.

'Leopold, here's some money,' said Doino. 'Go down and buy me some cigarettes. I don't want to be seen any more than I can help.' He then turned to the wife: 'Now, quickly, before he comes back. Your maiden name was Rado, wasn't it? What was your mother's name?'

'Why do you ask me? I won't tell you. Are you trying to cross-question me?'

'Be careful, Hilde. Your self-control and your lack of self-control are equally risky. Either could betray you. We're living in dangerous times.'

'For God's sake, what are you getting at?'

'At this. Before your father took his Hungarian name he was probably called Rosenbaum. You're a Jewess and . . .'

'No, I was christened as a baby.'

'That makes no difference according to the Party to which you belong. By their regulations you're a Jewess. Have you hidden your ancestry from Leopold?'

'I'm no Jewess, I've nothing to hide, I've never wanted to be Jewish, I've never had anything to do with Jews – what do you want from me? Are you blackmailing me? But I've already given in. I've told you you can stay here if you like.'

'Pull yourself together. Leopold will be back at any minute. He mustn't see you in this condition. No, I don't want to stay here. I'm frightened, of course I am, but I'd rather live for a thousand days with my fear than one hour with yours.'

'It's too late. I can't tell Leopold the truth now. Besides, it's not true, I'm not frightened. My nerves are so bad today simply because of Frau Lindenbaum. She was bleeding and I, I had to . . .'

'Don't talk about it any more,' said Leopold, who had returned with the cigarettes. 'Now then, when do you want me to collect the trunk, and where from?'

'You needn't bother,' said Doino, sniffing at the cigarettes. Leopold had bought the cheapest possible sort. 'You needn't bother. Your house isn't safe enough for my purposes.'

'What . . . what do you mean?'

'You told me yourself you're not one hundred per cent Nazis. Therefore one of these days you might get scared and hand over my trunk to the Gestapo. For the same reasons that stopped you lifting a finger to help the Lindenbaums.'

'How dare you speak to us like that?'

'Don't answer him, Faber, please don't get him all worked up. I grant you I should have done what I could for our Jewish neighbours. As soon as you've left we'll go up and see them. They must still be upset, we'll be nice to them. I'll apologise and explain everything. You can trust us, we'll look after your manuscripts carefully, only you mustn't despise us. Don't go away like this, let me make you a cup of tea.'

Leopold, too, grew calmer. He wanted to talk of the old days, to reminisce about their climbs together. 'Do you remember the time when . . .?' Doino did not finish his tea. It was late, and he still had nowhere to sleep. Hilde accompanied him to the tram. He took her arm, so that they should look like a harmless married couple going for an evening stroll together. They spoke of the weather. In the middle of a sentence concerning the unseasonable warmth of the spring sunshine she interrupted him, saying softly:

'Why should a person not deny people with whom he has no connections? Why is that wrong?'

He replied, in the same tone of voice:

'This is a wicked age. If a person denies his own people, the age will drive him much further than he would wish to go, it will make him into his brother's killer. You cannot grasp that fact yet, because this is only the beginning; the sequel and the end will be far, far worse than anything you may hope to avoid by your denials.'

'What you're saying has nothing to do with me. We're simple people, living a simple life. We haven't even got any children. We don't want to do anybody any harm. All we wish is to be left in peace.'

'You joined the Hitler party.'

'So did millions of others. It's nothing to do with politics. It's just that we wished to be left in peace. We're decent people, we're not contemptible. Why do you despise us?'

'If we're still alive a few years hence, you and I, I shall give you an answer. But it's doubtful if by then you will still need one. Tell Leopold to come to Stetten's house tomorrow for the trunk, about six o'clock in the evening would be best. Good luck to you! Don't forget to go up to the Lindenbaums. The memory that you went to see them will be welcome to you in years to come, and perhaps even useful.'

'Did you get the porter to open the front door for you?' Hofer asked. There was anxiety in his voice.

'No. I arrived just as he was about to close it. He saw me but he didn't ask where I was going. I went up to the fifth floor first of all, so he doesn't know I'm here.'

'It's a good job you know how to live illegally. Things are getting very dangerous. Sit down,' Hofer added in a friendly manner.

He was smartly dressed, and his clothes showed off his tall, slender figure to advantage. He had lost weight since he had stopped working at the factory. He gave the appearance of a middle-class man who had made up his mind to remain young for as long as he could.

'I intend to leave the country, but it will be a week before I can get a good passport. Until then, I need somewhere safe to hide.'

'I know a place for you,' Hofer said slowly, examining Doino carefully as though memorising the details of his appearance for the purpose of describing them later to some methodical and pedantic third party. 'It's a hut, a little house really, in a market garden. There are other comrades already there, all working men, and I'll have to tell them the truth about your political past, which will be difficult – at least to begin with. Because, you see, they don't care for Communists, they don't care for them at all. Still, there's nothing else for it. Come on, we'll try it. In the tram you must act the whole way as if you wanted to sleep. Me, I like your eyes, but they could easily betray you.'

It was some twenty minutes' walk from the terminus. Before they reached their destination they met a man whom Hofer addressed as Toni. The hut was at the far end of a fairly long garden. It contained only one room, but gave an appearance of spaciousness and comfort. Hofer introduced Doino to the five men there, of whom two, the oldest, were lying on iron camp-beds, while the remainder were rolled up in blankets on the wooden floor.

'His name is Ludwig, Ludwig Thaler, if you like. He needs to be sheltered, perhaps for a week, perhaps longer. He's not a simple case. I'll tell you everything I know about him, then you can ask him any questions you like, and after that you must decide for yourselves whether or not you agree to his staying here.'

Doino remained standing by the door. Hofer sat down on the bed of a grey-haired man who seemed reluctant to close the book that he was reading. They listened carefully. When Hofer had finished, the grey-haired man said:

'Come closer, Ludwig. Sit down on the bed over there. Hofer says you've left the Communist Party. What party do you belong to now?'

'None. I'm on my own. I'm what they used to call a wild man in the old Austrian parliament.'

'It must be hard for a man who's been so very much at the centre of things as you to belong to no party at all, Ludwig.'

'Yes, it is hard,' Doino replied. 'But I have friends scattered about the

world who are also on their own. One day those other wild men and I shall get together.'

'Then you'll start a new party and you'll fight against us Socialists.

'Possibly. Probably.'

'We're six comrades here, six including Toni who's on guard outside now. I lived here, entirely alone, for four years; the others only actually arrived a couple of weeks ago when the amnesty let them out of prison. The Nazis will certainly cancel the amnesty and will come for them again. We've decided to fight. We haven't got much in the way of arms, but it's enough. If we keep you here will you fight with us? Good! During the day we work in the garden while one of us looks after the house and does the cooking. Do you agree to this? Good! I approve of your staying, provided the others do.'

They were all in favour. Hofer made himself responsible for establishing contact with Stetten. They gave him two blankets and assigned him a place on the floor. Guard duty for the coming night had already been allotted, so he could sleep in peace.

He was there for five days. They began by continuing to distrust him, and he had to tell them a great deal about his early life; how he had been left an orphan at an early age, how he had spent his youth, why he had left his elder sister so young, and why he had not turned to her now in the hour of his need, since as an American citizen she could easily have helped him. He also had to describe for them the various foreign countries in which he had lived. They liked hearing in detail about the life of the workers in those lands, what they earned, how they lived, the way they spent their spare time. However, they did not want to hear of his past political activity; it was as if they felt they could forgive him the more easily if he would let them forget all about it.

Only once did one of them question him about this. It was the oldest man, and they were for a short time alone together.

'This is what I'd like to know,' he began. 'You're not a worker's son, you've never been a worker yourself, so what business of yours is a revolution of the proletariat? You didn't join the Communists in order to become a mayor or a minister or a commissar. That I can see, because you're not that sort. So why? Out of pity for us?'

They were peeling potatoes. Doino was slow at this; another man had to help him if the meal was to be ready on time, and the men disliked waiting for their food. He thought before replying. So many answers occurred to him, all true and all quite convincing, but for

the first time each one of them struck him as inadequate. At last he said:

'The dullest boy can find a whole string of reasons to explain why he loves his girl. And if those reasons are in fact silly or superficial ones, that doesn't invalidate in any way the basic cause of his love; on the contrary, perhaps the best reason for loving is no reason at all.'

'I'm not sure if I quite understand you. You mean you did what you did out of love for the working class?'

'No. Perhaps out of love for a vision of the world as it should be and could be.'

'Love for a vision? That's why you were what you were? That's why you lived without really living? That's why you dashed all over the world the way you did? Out of love for a vision?' And since Doino said nothing, sunk in thought, he went on: 'I'm not asking you on political grounds, you understand. But during the four years I spent alone here I had time to do a lot of thinking about human beings. And I reached the conclusion that it's not at all easy to know why a man does one thing instead of another. Love of a vision, of an idea you might say – that I can see, but why just that? Why not love for human beings? For a wife, children, for your comrades?'

Hofer himself came with Stetten's message. Mara had arrived and the business with the papers was going well.

The next day Doino was waiting by the roadside. The big car appeared punctually and drew up at the appointed spot. He walked up to it. Mara opened the door as though she were about to step out, but instead she pulled him towards her. He jumped quickly in and the car moved off.

When she freed him from her embrace he noticed for the first time an elderly lady seated beside the driver. She now turned and looked straight at him, saying:

'There's no need for you to introduce yourself. I've known all about you for many years. And you know who I am, the inevitable aunt. And this is Putzi. In the telephone directory he is listed as Count Robert Prevedini, Vice-admiral retired. You are his welcome guest, since from now on you are my nephew, Ivo. I hope you'll prove worthy of my family's great traditions; Putzi, say something at once, *mais quelque chose d'extrêmement gentil*.'

Putzi, who was a good sixty years old, obediently looked round.

'I'm very pleased to make acquaintance. I shall call you Ivo at once. And for you, I'm Putzi. Don't feel shy about it. In the Imperial and

Royal Navy everybody, from commanders up, addressed me as Putzi.'

They drove back to the city by a roundabout route.

'Four years since Prague. And now it's just you and me, Doino.'

He nodded, for his emotions were too great for words. She had changed. Her hair was almost white, her face so emaciated that it hurt him to look at her. The brilliance of her eyes had become dimmed and her bare arms were those of a little girl.

'Just a few more days. You'll have to change your appearance a little, and then we'll get you out. It will all go well, as you'll see.'

'Of course, Mara, of course,' he said.

'Be calm. Look out of the window. I realise you need time to become accustomed to the way I now look.'

She took his hand. He leaned back and closed his eyes.

They took him at once to his room. It was a fine, big room, containing too much furniture and too many carpets, with a big old harpsichord beside the french window that led out on to the balcony. He sat down in a deep armchair and picked up a book. He wished to regain his self-control. Yet he still saw Mara's face before his eyes. Perhaps she ought not to rouge her lips or colour her cheeks.

The aunt, big and preposterously fat, entered by a door of which he was unaware.

'*Désolée, vraiment désolée,*' she began. 'Now I can talk to you without interruption, since I've persuaded Betsy to lie down for a while. Seeing you again has upset her. You realise, of course, that she is ill, seriously ill.'

The baroness had not aged. Her voice had remained shrill and girlish, a voice that would have been suitable to some bird-like creature, but that certainly came most oddly from her great body. As always she spiced her sentences with French phrases and, less frequently, with Croat words. Her remarks were curiously disconnected, so that at first her intelligence seemed in doubt. Doino could not bear to hear her speak of 'the late *cher* Vasso', and to refer to his death as that '*effroyable incident*'; yet fundamentally everything that she said about Mara – whom she invariably called Betsy – was correct. Mara could not forgive herself for having given in to Vasso's insistence that she go away and leave him alone. She had learned from Djoura how her husband had spent the last few weeks before his imprisonment and the prospect of his loneliness had been since then an agony to her, an agony of which she did not wish to be relieved. It was understandable and normal that she had not adjusted herself to a life without Vasso, that she still saw

everything in reference to him. But what was not right was Mara's continual and total inactivity, not the fact that she had never so much as expressed her hatred of his murderers in a single word. She would not tolerate anyone mentioning them, or Russia, in her presence. Had Faber not been Vasso's closest friend, and was he not *dévoué à Betsy qui, elle, n'est faite que de fidélité*? His message, with its appeal for help, had had an immediate and great effect. For the first time Mara was once again herself. She had made all the necessary arrangements, and how cleverly!

The end of this long monologue was a curious mixture of family reminiscences – designed to prove their traditional right to extravagant eccentricity – and of amazing psychological and political comment. But most surprising of all were her final conclusions. Mara was sick and the doctors could give many reasons for her dangerous loss of weight; none of them were convincing. There was only one possible cure for her complaint – a return to political activity. The more *éclatant* that return, the more effective the cure. The aunt was ready to place everything she possessed in the way of fortune or connections at the disposal of the cause; what the cause was to be, Doïno should decide, since its nature made no difference provided always that Mara could be prevailed upon to join it.

She would not let him speak. She did not wish to hear his answer. She knew that he could be relied upon.

He accompanied her to the door and there kissed her hand, saying: 'Thank you, Baroness. You are a great woman.'

'Yes, of course.' She waved her hand, as though she contemplated tapping him on the cheek with her fan. 'Of course, I'm a great woman. Almost six foot, and a spinster. I'll soon be sixty, which I suppose is young for a cathedral. And Putzi is my fiancé, he's always been my fiancé, for over forty years. Another nine and a half years and we shall be celebrating our golden engagement anniversary. *Embrassez la tante éternelle, jeune homme!*'

He spent the evening in Mara's room. She insisted on his telling her everything that had happened to him since their last meeting in Prague. He only spoke of those things that would have interested Vasso, and in a way that the latter would have appreciated. When he stopped at certain points it was because he expected the questions which Vasso would certainly have asked. It was a reckoning of his past actions that he was thus presenting to his dead friend, an explanation of why, for such a long time, he had participated in the mistakes, the lies and the

corruption of what had been their movement. Finally he spoke of his meeting with Albert Gråfe in Oslo, of his sudden break with the Party, of his conversations with Karel in Rouen and with Djoura in Paris. He only briefly touched on how he had heard of Vasso's death.

For a long time they were silent. At last Mara said:

'Had his death been any other, if it had been sickness or if his old enemies had killed him . . . but like that . . . a murder designed to dishonour his whole pure, fine life. I could live without Vasso, but I cannot survive such a death, nor the thought that Vasso was so utterly alone and so defenceless at the end. Whatever your intentions may be, yours and Djoura's and the others', I'm finished, useless. Help me, Doino, help me to die.'

Now at last he could look straight into her eyes, and those eyes were not dulled, but were filled with a great longing. He took her hands in his and stroked them gently to bring back the warmth to her fingers. He sat down on the edge of her bed and smoothed back her hair, the poor white hairs of an old woman. He raised a glass to her lips and softly urged her to drink. Thus he allowed a little time to pass, before replying:

'Vasso sent you back to us because he knew that we would need you. You are now saving me from certain death. Do you not think that that is what he would have wished? There is so much to be done. Nothing began with us, so why should we mark the end of hope? We must live on, at least until the end of this "winter sleep of conscience". That is what a comrade called it, in a letter he wrote from Spain just before he died.'

She closed her eyes and turned her face to the wall, as though she wished to hear no more. He went back to his chair and waited. She did not sleep and he waited throughout the night. Frequently he forgot her. In the market gardener's hut he had started to think and to dream of the 'simple life'. While listening to the working men with whom he had shared that hut, he had realised what Stetten meant when he spoke of the 'epic life'. He had had enough of the dramatic, enough of intimacy with fate, more than enough of himself and of 'dialectical consciousness'. Rarely can any man have cherished so colourless an ideal. So he, too, like Mara, had wished to end his life, but with epic slowness, in an ever-unchanging decline of small and uneventful days.

Towards morning Mara spoke at last.

'I shall sleep in a little while now. Go to your room. I shall not leave you so long as you still need me.'

'We shall always need you, Mara.'

'Perhaps, Doino. Sleep well. And when you awake, think of something useful for me to do.'

Putzi maintained contact with Stetten. They met daily and together worked out, to the last detail, the arrangements for the departure. Putzi announced, with a mixture of pride and jealousy, that Marie-Thérèse, as he called the baroness, had completely bewitched the professor. It was not impossible, he said, that matrimony might result. The aunt was not displeased by this teasing, and all that she criticised in Stetten was what she called his *noblesse à prix réduit*. But she denied any intentions of forming a *mésalliance* since, as she pointed out, even to marry into the Prevedini family would not, for her, be a step up the social scale.

Doino's moustache grew rapidly and he came more and more to resemble the nephew Ivo. In four days' time he would be leaving. His passport was in order and it was properly stamped to show that he had entered the country only a short time before.

Everything was going well. He had met Hofer successfully for the last time, and the latter had given him important messages to take abroad. The fact that he had not immediately recognised Doino was a good sign, for Doino had also changed his hair style and was now dressed in the manner of a slightly ageing young dandy. Then, against all the rules of conspiracy, Stetten telephoned. He could not leave with them; something terrible had happened. Putzi went to him at once and came back with appalling news: Agnes had disappeared. The little girl's mother, who had signed away all her rights to the child in favour of her grandfather, had come to fetch her, accompanied by two German Nazi officials, of whom one was her second husband. Stetten's chauffeur, who, it now transpired, was himself a Nazi, and the child's nurse had both been involved in the plot. When Stetten returned from the walk which was to be his final farewell to the city and to his home, he found the house deserted and, in the nursery, a note from Marlies.

The baroness fetched him in her car and brought him to Doino's room, where she left the two men alone together. He said, even before he sat down:

'I only let the baroness bring me here because I want to tell you this, Doino. Don't worry about me. Leave. We mustn't multiply our misfortunes.'

He had thought up this sentence in the car, which was why he pronounced his words as though they did not move him deeply. Then he broke down. It took him a long time to find his handkerchief. When

at last he raised it to his eyes he used it simply to polish his spectacles, for he had forgotten why he had taken it from his pocket. Then he stood with it in his hand while he gazed vaguely about the room, his glance finally resting on the harpsichord.

'I won't leave without you, as well you know. I won't let my dearest friend reject me.'

Those were the correct words. Stetten repeated, sobbing:

'Reject? But Dion, now we're entirely alone. There's no Agnes any more.'

He drew from his pocket a sheet of blue paper. Doino read:

I am taking back my daughter. I have a right to her. I am her mother and I must think of her future. This sudden separation is best for you, too.

Yours affectionately,

Marlies Tann

It was a hopeless situation. No advocate in all Germany would dare to take an action against Marlies, the wife of the powerful Tann. Besides, her insistence on her rights as a mother was justifiable.

'Where can Agnes be now? What will they do to her? They'll make her forget me, they'll compel her to forget everything.'

He became ever more sunk into himself and no longer heard what was said to him. For in reality he could not believe in the truth of what had happened. He thought of it all as a misunderstanding that must be cleared up within the next few hours. He wished to go home, at once, since he was convinced that Agnes would be there, that she would have run away from that stranger, Marlies. There was no preventing him. He left, he must hurry, Agnes would be waiting.

That night he came back. Putzi had meanwhile discovered that Marlies and her husband had left early that afternoon by plane for Munich, taking the child and her nurse with them.

When Stetten heard this, and now knew for sure that he had lost Agnes, he collapsed and fainted, but his merciful unconsciousness lasted only a short time. They would not allow him to return home again, and he shared Doino's room. For days he was sunk in silence, nor could he bear being spoken to. Yet he would not be left alone. Doino arranged that Mara should take his place on the occasions when he had to go out of the room.

And so almost a week of anguish went by. Then one evening, when the baroness and Putzi were sitting with Doino, paying their silent visit to Stetten, the professor suddenly seemed to wake up, like a sick man coming out of a coma. He spoke in his customary, self-assured

manner, enquired after Mara, and requested that someone bring her to him. When they were all together he said:

'I have been a great nuisance to you all during these last days. Please forgive me. I should like to thank you all for the friendship you have shown me; it is far beyond anything I may have deserved. Now I wish to tell you what I have decided. It will surprise you, since it is not at all my style and is appropriate neither to my past nor to my age. I would hasten to add that it has almost no connection with those recent events which have affected me personally. Now, however, I hesitate to tell it you, even though it can be expressed in a single sentence, a sentence that, coming from me, must appear ridiculous rather than startling.'

The baroness wished to help him.

'Come, tell us,' she said. 'Putzi and I are grown-up people, and as for these *chers jeunes gens*, there's no surprising them these days.'

Stetten still hesitated. He glanced almost shyly at Doino, as though it were his disapproval that he feared above all. At last, in clumsy sentences, he announced that he had decided to commit an act of terrorism against the régime.

'But my dear professor, my dear professor . . .' Putzi had raised his voice in his agitation. He would have gone on, had the baroness not interrupted him.

'Sit down, Putzi! Will you sit down this instant! You're behaving as though you'd just caught Stetten licking the whipped cream off the top of a meringue. Betsy, tell us at once, what does it mean "an act of terrorism"?''

When Mara had ended her brief explanation the aunt said:

'I thought right away, Stetten, that that is no business for you. At your age you should leave such things alone. It's a job for reliable, healthy young people, who don't mind if they have to wait for several hours in the rain or snow before the grand duke or minister comes by they want to have a shot at. But you, why, you'd catch a cold, pneumonia, heaven knows what, and in a couple of days you'd be a dead terrorist. No, no, that's no career for you.'

It was all preposterous and, at the same time, macabre. Like so many plague spots the concentration camps and the political prisons were springing up across the land, while a secret police with practically unlimited power pulverised every sort of resistance; behind the police were the para-military organisations, armed and ready to commit any outrage, any crime; behind them again stood the nation's youth, intoxicated with the promise that it might smash the world in pieces;

in the background were the dozens of millions of men and women who had given in so utterly that they soon began to believe their acceptance of the yoke to have been voluntary, that their submission became for them a mark of honour; and then there was the rest of Europe, democratic Europe, frightened of Hitler's victory yet not desiring his overthrow. In the streets of Paris and London people snatched the extra editions from the hands of the newsvendors that they might read the sensational reports of Hitler's latest speech: was he satisfied at last? Would he allow them to live out their lives in happiness and cowardice, behind those fortifications which were supposed to make their defeat impossible? And now, in Vienna, it was possible to measure the pointlessness of resisting a force which was feared even by those who lived beyond the range of its power and who had, moreover, millions of soldiers at their disposal.

And so there they sat, those zombies. The vice-admiral of an empire that had vanished twenty years before, an aged man still called by his baby nickname of Putzi; old Erich von Stetten, who now at last, when it was too late, had developed a taste for action, who wished to desert the epic and rush headlong into the dramatic rôle of assassin, and that simply because he did not see how he could live one day longer without a four-year-old child, the only being he had ever loved without reason, without reserve and without limit; the inimitable Marie-Thérèse, whose only argument against terrorism was that it was likely to place too great a strain on the health of elderly gentlemen; Mara, living only in the memory of one who was dead; and Doino, who had thrown himself into the abyss rather than continue along a path which he recognised as false. And all around them, in their house, on the streets, throughout the city, were countless ears listening for every suspicious sound, in a country that from one day to the next had suddenly sprouted a whole population of informers.

The aunt, whose volubility now knew no bounds, talked on and on, her train of thought, if so it could be called, pursuing elaborate byways and detours, until at last she was discussing Marie-Antoinette, *la chère reine malheureuse*, who could and should have reached a ripe, royal old age, ' . . . but unfortunately there were no determined young men, terrorists as you call them, to set her free. If I were a man I should simply kill that corporal, that repulsive plebeian, I'd shoot him from his saddle when he was taking his morning ride.'

'But Hitler never rides,' interjected Putzi.

'Well, of course, if he doesn't even have a horse!' The baroness' voice was loud with mingled disappointment and disgust. Then, her tone

quickly changing, she went on calmly: '*Dommage, mais alors* the only thing to do is to toss a bomb at the fellow.'

'Professor, you must look after yourself,' said Doino. 'It's late, time you took your medicine. Let's all call it a day and go to bed.'

'You're embarrassed by my foolishness, aren't you?' And since Doino did not reply, Stetten went on: 'I shall go to Munich. I must see Agnes once again to say farewell. Surely Marlies will not stop me doing that. I shall then request an audience with Hitler and shall shoot him. It should be quite simple. Then it will be up to you and your friends to make the people understand the purpose of my action. Whatever your opinions may be you will agree that it will not be uninteresting to study the effects of such a murder.'

'You won't be there to study them.'

'No, I won't. But you will. And others.'

'I still cannot believe that you are speaking seriously, Professor. Have a little rest and then we'll discuss it all again later.'

'It's not only my words you don't take seriously, Faber, it's me. How about you, Frau Mara?'

'I don't know, Herr Professor. Perhaps if I understood your motives . . .'

'Motives? Never before has justice been so powerless as now, never has there been a defeat so contemptible as ours. For one hundred and fifty years the so-called progressive parties have relied on the masses, as though there were a shred of evidence that these so-called masses were on their side. Meanwhile contemporary tyranny, whether it be of the red or of the brown variety, treats them with sovereignty, and they follow it far more eagerly than ever they have any truly liberating movement. So only the individual, and the action of the individual, remain. For example, myself, who have always been an individual. My act cannot be misunderstood. I shall be both judge and prosecutor, witness and executioner . . .'

Doino interrupted him.

'In whose name?'

'Precisely in nobody's name, I shall invoke nobody's authority. The disproportion between Hitler's power and mine is alone sufficient to condemn him. You must understand that we have now returned to an age we believed closed, an age in which acts by individuals are of moral necessity. Should such acts not take place, then the conscience of our contemporaries will simply rot away and no scruple will retain them being accomplices in the ultimate ignominies. The Communists are afraid of terrorism; even here, where they are oppressed, they live in

the acceptance of that police state which they too would like to create. The Socialists are a product of the peaceful nineteenth century and they wait for its return. Frau Mara, you of all people must surely see that one cannot simply stand by, inactive, and watch the flowering of such evil. Doino, do you refuse to understand that it is neither a question of Agnes, nor that I am looking for a tragic dénouement? Why do you desert me at this particular moment?’

‘Doino,’ Mara said quickly, ‘please don’t start a theoretical discussion about the value of individual acts of terror. If Professor Stetten has the slightest prospect of getting near Hitler, then his project must be taken seriously and we must do everything in our power to help him. Do you agree?’

‘Yes, but he has no prospect of getting near Hitler with a gun. And even if he had, it would be knocked out of his hand before he could fire it. Furthermore . . .’

The baroness now interrupted:

‘Theoretically, perhaps not; in practice, it remains to be seen.’

Doino glanced at her. He was shocked and he looked away as he said:

‘But this is madness! The professor would simply be kicked to death by twenty pairs of boots, and for no purpose whatsoever. I cannot agree that such a life should be ended, such a man destroyed. The professor has a great work to complete. That, and that alone, is what counts.’

Putzi cleared his throat:

‘Excuse me, Herr Baron, if you would forgive me asking you . . . briefly . . . are you actually an experienced marksman?’

‘I have never handled a gun in my life,’ said Stetten meekly.

The silence that followed this surprising admission was broken by Mara:

‘When Vasso was convinced that it was no longer possible to save the Party by normal means, he decided to eliminate the man in whose name, and by whose will, the movement had been corrupted all over the world and the revolution in Russia destroyed. He turned to his old comrades in arms, the best of men, and they recoiled in horror before he had even defined his proposals. All of them have since been condemned on the grounds that they had organised an attempt to assassinate Stalin. But as for Vasso, the only one who had decided to kill the corrupter, him they did not accuse of this; they didn’t even suspect him of complicity in a plot to which they compelled innocent men to confess.’

'Wait a minute,' said Putzi, excitedly. 'Wait a minute! That's extraordinarily interesting. You see at the time of the sailors' mutiny at Cattaro . . . which I dissolved—that's not the right word: crushed, that's what I mean—when I crushed the Cattaro mutiny I began by feeling sorry for the men, because after all a sailor's a sailor even if he is a mutineer. But later on, and particularly now, when I think back, you know, Marie Thérèse, I feel a real respect for those men. I can't help it. You see, in their own way, they were really a sort of aristocrat. And if we possessed a navy today, and sailors like them—those men, of course, we had to have shot—and Hitler visited Pola or Cattaro, I'm quite sure they'd finish him off in short order.'

'Be quiet, Prevedini, you've completely missed the point. What Betsy was trying to say . . .'

'I beg your pardon, of course I've missed the point, but I can still feel the truth.'

That night, when they were at last alone together and both unhappy that they should be of such contrary convictions, Stetten said:

'Of course you're quite right. I couldn't say that this evening. The baroness and the admiral made the whole conversation even more ridiculous than it need be. But if, after all, even you don't understand, then . . .'

'I understand, but I don't agree with you.'

'That is precisely what I mean. No doubt Hanusia told you about her husband. That Ukrainian died fighting for Vienna. He covered the escape of Hofer and his comrades—one man, all alone. Do you think he acted wrongly?'

'No, certainly not. But on the other hand his act was not an act of individual terrorism.'

They talked for a long time. It was apparent that Stetten would not abandon his project, even if he were convinced from the beginning that it must fail. So Doino gave in. This separation, the ultimate one, should not be unworthy of a friendship that had survived so many separations in the past. He only asked for one condition, that the professor should have a week's rest in order to recover his strength and should not act impetuously. By the time their conversation was over they could speak kindly to one another, for both knew that theirs was a friendship which only death could dissolve.

Each of them lay awake in his bed, contemplating the curious course developments had taken; it now seemed as though the elder man would end his life in a manner suitable to the whole past of the younger;

while the latter, in his turn, would continue along the road that the other was now abandoning. Towards dawn, when they were still both awake, there came a knock on the door. It was the baroness. She walked across to Stetten and hung an amulet about his neck. He said:

'I'm not a believer. The Cross cannot help me.'

'*Ne soyez pas vilain*, Stetten. You must keep it. It has been blessed. And even if the Madonna won't help you, its precious stones may, if you've got the wit to know how to use it properly. It's already proved its efficacy once, when it moved the hard heart of an ancestor of mine so that he let the Turk, who gave it him, escape – even though the firing squad was already drawn up to shoot the infidel. So now I can sleep in peace because, me, I believe in the miraculous powers of the Madonna.'

In the days that followed, Stetten's decision was not discussed. Doino was to go abroad before the professor left for Munich, and was immediately to make the necessary preparations so that the attempt on Hitler's life, whether it succeeded or not, should receive maximum publicity.

Four days later, in the morning, Stetten went to his house. He wished to find his will and take it to his lawyers, for the purpose of making certain alterations to its contents. The porter greeted him with the phrase that had now become hallowed by years of inveterate use:

'Your humble servant, Herr Baron, the weather hasn't turned out so badly after all, has it?'

But the porter's manner was no longer the same. Stetten did not notice the change. He lingered in his grand-daughter's nursery and stayed longer at the house than he had intended to do. Several times he got up to leave and then sat down again. The front-door bell rang. It was two men in uniform. They told him to come with them quietly.

Already on the stairs they began to address him rudely in the second person singular. A car was waiting outside the gate into which they pushed him. He was taken to the hotel on the edge of the Danube canal which the Gestapo had requisitioned. He was put into a small room and told to wait; this had previously been a bathroom, but the fixtures had been removed. From time to time men in uniform would open the door, look in, and slam it again with an oath. Then two men entered in civilian clothes. They were both heavily built, one of medium height, the other somewhat shorter. They walked up to him and, when he did not step back, they knocked him to the ground. The smaller man leaned down with his hand out, as though to help him to his feet, but

the gesture quickly changed. Stetten was not expecting the blow. His spectacles broke and he felt a pain, first dull but rapidly growing sharp, in his forehead and nose. As he lifted his hand to his eyes he was struck again, this time with some solid object. His hand felt as though it were on fire. He wished to take it away gently from his face, and at that moment he was struck again. Slowly he opened his eyes. Above him he saw their two faces. They were spitting into his mouth, into his eyes. He raised his other hand to wipe away the spittle. Blows rained down on this hand too, but he would not let it drop. He covered his mouth with his fingers. They dragged him to his feet and pushed him against the wall. His forehead banged against it and his knees began to buckle, but he managed to remain upright. The bigger man pulled him about and the smaller one stuck a pistol in his stomach. Stetten closed his eyes; he seemed to be falling into nothingness. They began to scream obscenities at him, repeating over and over again: 'Talk, you sod! Tell the truth, you bastard!'

The pistol was still pressed into his stomach, but now it had lost its effectiveness. Stetten was himself again. This was a fine feeling, and he thought: 'It's not so bad, after all, it's just stupid. They're fools, cretins.' He opened his eyes, looked at them, and said: 'Cretins, silly cretins, that's what you are.' They hit him on the side of the head and did not stop shouting at him. He felt a frightful pain in his mouth, and when he opened it fragments of his false teeth fell out; he spat bloody shreds of flesh. It was difficult for him to enunciate, but he went on saying: 'Cretins, silly cretins!' The smaller man half throttled him with his tie while the other went on hitting him on the ear. Then they tore his clothes off him, leaving him only in his underpants, and they kicked him into a corner. He was alone now. He tried to lean against the wall, but it hurt his back. He felt tears running down his cheeks and over his broken nose. He repeated to himself: 'It is not I who am crying, it is just my eyes that are weeping, and that is unimportant.' He raised his hand to his throbbing neck and felt the thin chain. The cross still hung from it.

A man in uniform entered, followed by two others. The former shouted in a stentorian voice:

'What the hell are you doing, lying down? What do you think this is, a nursing home?'

The other two men guffawed. Their superior smiled with enjoyment at this appreciation of his wit.

'Nursing home indeed! We'll teach disloyal filth like you what sort of a home this is. Who told you you could lie down? Get up! Lie down!

Get up! Lie down! Now behave yourself, walk on all fours like a good little dog. Go on, on all fours, I say, on all fours, to your interrogation.'

Stetten hesitated. Then he rose slowly to his feet. He looked at them, one by one. The uniformed man turned away, saying:

'All right. Bring him along to me at once for interrogation. I've wasted enough time with him as it is. He's not worth it.'

They kicked him outside, they kicked along the corridor, they kicked him into the room where he was to be interrogated for the first time.

It was already late afternoon, and still the professor had not returned. Putzi went to his house and learned from the porter that two gentlemen had come to see the baron a few days before. They had, he said, returned today and taken the baron away with them as he was entering his house.

When it began to be dark Doino went to see Leopold. He intended to ask him immediately to engage an influential lawyer on Stetten's behalf.

Hilde opened the door. As soon as she recognised Doino she raised her hand to her mouth, as though to smother a cry. He stepped quickly across the threshold.

'Tell me!' he said, examining her closely. She half turned away and said:

'Yes, but we were absolutely certain you'd crossed the frontier days ago. For heaven's sake, why are you still here?'

He seized her by the elbow and pulled her into the circle of light beneath the hanging lamp:

'Show me the trunk. I want to see where you've put it.' His voice was urgent.

She said nothing. He stared into her eyes and repeated his question. Still she said nothing and now her eyes were closed. He gripped the neck of her dress and shouted:

'You are the vilest, vilest . . .'

It was as though some irresistible force compelled him to repeat over and over again, with trembling lips, that one word, 'vilest, vilest . . .' The dress tore in his fingers and he could feel her bare skin, the swell of her breast. Quickly he withdrew his hand and put it in his pocket.

The woman covered her breast with her forearm and in a small, hoarse voice she said:

'We were absolutely certain. . . . If we'd only guessed, believe me, we wouldn't have . . .'

He stood for a while behind the main door of the building. He was trembling all over, and only when, opening his coat, he saw that his body was not still, did he step out into the street and hurry towards the telephone booth at the corner. Then he noticed a taxi coming slowly towards him. He hailed it and gave the driver Gusti Torloni's address. The old servant woman opened the door and led him into the drawing-room. Gusti came up to him, kissed him, and then looked at him closely.

'How smart you are, a real dandy almost! It's easy to see you're better.'

He let her chatter away. Her husband was travelling again, which was all to the good if he had a free evening; she had an engagement in town, but she could cancel it easily enough. He stared at her, not at her face, and he wanted her. The reasons for this desire did not confuse him, it was all quite clear. The treachery of people and Hilde's naked breast and the fact that he had been so long without a woman, and the desperate sadness of today. He let her lead him to the telephone. He could tell Mara what had happened, for they had their own language, incomprehensible to anyone who might be tapping the wire. He explained to her that Stetten would certainly be tortured to Doino's hiding-place, and that they would therefore have to do it every night – all except the aunt, who must prepare to go in with the Agnes' mother. He heard Mara's heavy breathing as she said:

'I understand. It will be all right, *najdrozi moj*.'

Those last words, which meant *my beloved*, she had often accustomed to use when speaking to Vasso. She addressed them now to Doino because she recognised the extent of his unutterable despair.

When he returned to the drawing-room he found that Gusti had already undressed. She was wearing a dark red dressing-gown. She took him by the hand and led him into a small room.

Voluptuousness and oblivion, and then full consciousness once again. He was detached from his body now, as he had been once before under torture – it was his body only that took this woman, that gave itself to her. He was just a spectator, watching an act of the saddest obscenity. He would have liked to close his eyes against it, but he knew that if he did he would see Stetten, beaten, bloody, cowering in a corner. And it was because of him that the old man was being tortured.

They ate a cold supper together. Gusti talked ceaselessly, saying everything that came into her head. This was a wonderful time for buying up valuable stuff, jewels, furs, old furniture, porcelain – it was

the Jews, they were all selling out before going abroad. She was sorry for them, and so she bought all she could, thank God she had the money, her husband, being an Italian and an old Fascist, was cashing in on the present good feeling for Italy.

'And thank God he is an Italian. Otherwise he'd have to be a Nazi now, and I wouldn't like that one little bit. Tell me, you don't care for the Nazis either, do you?'

Before leaving, he wrote a letter and explained to her carefully exactly what she must say when she delivered it personally to the Gestapo next day. He made her repeat his words back to him verbatim.

She accompanied him as far as the neighbourhood of the station. The baroness was standing by the door of the sleeping car; she embraced him, talking loudly in a mixture of French and Croat. Doyno climbed up into the train. He found Mara already in the compartment. They looked out of the window, towards the platform opposite. S.S. men were driving prisoners into a train, hitting them with their whips. They would force them up the steps, with their hands held above their heads, where other S.S. men were waiting to kick them back down. Mara lowered the blind, but he raised it again.

They got out at the first station in Switzerland. He telephoned Gusti, giving his full name, so that the wire-tappers would know at once who he was. She promised to deliver his letter to the Gestapo.

Putzi said:

'So now I'm an émigré! I've heard tell of them, it seems there are even books about them, and now I'm one myself in all seriousness! Well, well!'

They separated that same day, Putzi going on down into Italy, where he had a nephew who was a landed gentleman. Doyno let himself be interviewed in Zurich. He sent the newspaper clipping and photograph to Vienna. The letter and the interview must surely convince the Gestapo that his whereabouts were unknown to Stetten.

They stayed for two days in Geneva, waiting for a telegram from the baroness. It contained good news. Marlies was prepared to intervene with the authorities for Stetten's release.

They went on to Paris. Stetten was to rejoin them there, if and when he was set free.

PART TWO

. . . Have Lighted Fools The Way

CHAPTER I

EVERYTHING about this city was famous. Even the delicacy of its skies was praised throughout the world, as though this too was somehow a creditable achievement on the part of its inhabitants. Somewhere, a thousand miles away, a young man would dream of that sky, certain that he could only complete himself, like a work of art, beneath its vault. In the place that was his home nothing held any meaning for him any more, neither the deep, dark woods on the far horizon, nor the willows weeping at the river's edge, neither the murmuring waters nor the washerwomen with their skirts tucked high – all seemed pallid compared to the distant light of that Parisian sky. He saw himself walking down the narrow streets, entering a paint shop – he called it a *marchand de couleurs*, repeating to himself the foreign words as though they were a charm – exchanging a completed picture for two canvases and some oils. For he knew that the men whose paintings were the pride of that great city had started as poor as himself.

The city was famous, too, for love, both that which is bought and that which is given; they might almost have been invented there. Somewhere a timber merchant, inspecting his trees, dreamed of an enormous sensuality, of a room whose walls and ceiling were polished mirrors, of a woman who was many different women. How many feet of oak, ash and walnut must he ship abroad before he too could afford the joys of that city's splendid and graceful wickedness?

Even the ultimate paupers of that city, the *clochards*, were a source of wonderment. Somewhere a shipping magnate dreamed of becoming a *clochard*. Whenever the stair carpet in his home was rumpled, or his wife had 'her pride like anybody else', he would console himself with the thought that one day he would vanish, would simply disappear into Paris, an anonymous *clochard*.

Thus countless persons lived under the spell of that city, of its creations, and even of its scandals. Its effect was incalculable; it spurred on the ambitious or it destroyed ambition; it taught love or a contempt for love, faith or scepticism. A pastor came from far away, anxious to find traces of the persecution inflicted upon the Huguenots. He stood before a little church whose bell had once sounded the tocsin for the St

Bartholomew massacres. Deeply moved he paced the courtyards and streets and bridges where his fellow-believers had been so cruelly struck down. In the libraries and among the archives he searched for documents which would add new fuel to his zealot's hatred. He stayed longer than he had planned, letting his parishioners wait. And then there was no sense in his returning home, since he had lost his faith. He earned his living as best he could, selling obscene photographs, or a chemical substance alleged to destroy a smoker's craving for tobacco, or other items of questionable value. Then one day, at about eleven o'clock in the morning, he suddenly regained his faith while gazing at the tumble-down church of St Julian the Poor. He asked to be received into a religious order.

Yes, Paris brought more men to the true faith than all the holy places put together. Arrogant intellectuals would suddenly know deep within themselves that around the corner a church had been waiting, waiting just for them. And their arrogance would turn to humility.

There was a place here for everyone and everything, there was nothing that the city could not assimilate. There were streets named after saints, and naturally Sainte Opportune was not ignored, being endowed with a street and a square for herself alone; for the generals and the marshals there were avenues; nor were the poets forgotten. It is true that the city could not often afford to give the poets avenues; they had to make do with smaller streets, alleyways, sometimes even de-sacs or passages. The musicians were in general more handsomely treated, their streets lying in the best parts of town, in the *x quartiers*. The painters, too, were well looked after.

or did the town forget its past victories. These were preserved ply in the names of battlefields: Wagram, Friedland, Jena. . . . And even such a one was immortalised in the form, say, of a metro station, would be on many lips each day. One, Austerlitz, was now the name of a railway station, not to mention the street, the quay, the bridge and the anchorage that were also called after it. No one thought to quarrel with the municipal authorities about their choice of names; they were not expected to be any more just to the past than history itself.

The city was patient – for years, for decades – and angry for a day or two at a time, dates that the children in the schools learned by heart. The inhabitants were almost preposterously loyal; did not aged actresses play the part of beautiful young girls, and were they not cheered to the echo? And they were unfaithful; each day some fresh person had to be discovered whom they could applaud. And the great cemeteries were visited, in general, only by foreign visitors.

The city was cruel, as are all great cities, but it was not harsh to its poor, they were not made to feel that they were outcasts. The streets of their quarters belonged to them, as did the benches on the edge of the sidewalks beneath the trees. Their trees blossomed at the same time as those of the rich. The *bistros*, the city's little bars, were not closed against them. And in the subway a man who had the time and no pressing business could travel all day, from dawn to midnight, on a single ticket through the tunnels that stretched to every part and corner of the city.

There were many foreigners. Some had come 'to enjoy life', some to earn their daily bread, others to while away the time until they should inherit a throne, or come into a fortune, or marry an extremely wealthy but not yet quite widowed lady.

Paris had always harboured émigrés, some of whom were there of their own free will, while others were exiles from their native lands. They were a part of the city, like the periodically recurring financial scandals, the exotic restaurants, and the new geniuses discovered overnight. Confusion here was well organised; even the unexpected, the sensational, occurred at the correct moment and ended at the proper time.

It had been this way for many years, and thus the approaching change was recognised only indistinctly and unwillingly.

The number of political refugees was constantly on the increase. The small proportion of them with means rented expensive dwellings; lawyers, who were at least officers of the *Légion d'Honneur*, completed the necessary formalities with the police on their behalf. The rest, however, wanted to work. But the right to work was only bestowed as a special favour, and was far more frequently refused. That was not the worst. By applying for a work permit the refugee made himself suspect of poverty and thus ran the danger of being expelled.

Even the managers of the wretchedest buildings were unwilling to let flats to people who had no definite source of income. So they lived, at far greater expense, in the little hotels, where they occupied the cheapest rooms beneath the eaves. When called to the telephone they therefore had plenty of time, while going down the many flights of stairs, to decide that this must certainly be the long awaited, the decisive summons. They would prepare their replies, only to find that it was some indifferent acquaintance requesting a loan – just for six hours, not a minute longer, I promise you – of 8 francs, 75 centimes.

Constantly were they awaiting the one important message. It might come by telephone or telegram; the postman might bring it; it might be in the evening edition which would be on sale in half an hour's time,

or on the midnight news. A chance encounter in a café bar, on the other hand, could also be it.

For many people here a promise made was only the expression of non-committal politeness, a gesture of fleeting, cheap and rather cowardly sympathy. This the foreigners soon understood, and yet they went on believing in those promises, although each time they had to pay for their belief with hours of deepening despair.

They themselves hardly realised how ghostly were their lives, and the others did not realise it at all. Like the poor people who had been born there, they became wet when it rained, cold when it froze; they too warmed themselves in the spring or autumn sunshine, they too took refuge from the summer's heat beneath the branches of the trees. But wherever they were and whatever they did, they were transients. Soon their train must leave; indeed, since the signs of impending change were never lacking, their departure would surely take place almost at once. There was no point in unpacking, apart from the fact that the suitcase quickly disappeared. The companion of their travels might also vanish. If he were not dead, he was surely no great distance away. They would meet him again on the train that must now be about to leave.

There were those who were politically active. They were enormously busy, organising the émigrés, distributing roneotyped newspapers, collecting the ghosts together so that each might recover his rank and title. Among them were future ministers, people's commissars, leaders of mass movements. But the masses, the armies and the country, all that was *over there*, with those false leaders against whom they poured out their torrents of spoken and written abuse. Yes, they were fighting a hard and great battle against an enemy who grew every day more powerful; they were also engaged in skirmishes against one another. Frequently it seemed to them that they must drown in the sea of bitterness. And there was something else that threatened them, the curious, fundamentally ridiculous and unhappy love that buoyed them up. For they loved this city whose seduction it was to give decline the lustre and charm of surrender.

And the decline had begun.

The little sail-boat started off well enough towards the fountain; soon it stopped, rocking up and down, otherwise motionless. Little Paul looked at it despairingly, for his stick was not long enough to reach his toy and give it the necessary push. Doino consoled him. In this pond, he said, all the boats found the right way, all reached their true harbour.

'It's the best pond in the world. Everywhere, all over the earth, there

are children who think of nothing except how much they'd like to play in the Luxembourg Gardens.'

The child scarcely listened. Only when his boat began to move again did he calm down and run, his stick held awkwardly, to the far side of the pond. The grown-ups climbed the stairs to the upper terrace and sat down on the iron chairs.

'You haven't aged. In fact, you're almost prettier than you used to be,' said Mara.

Relly did not answer at once, for she was deep in thought. She was remembering that late afternoon which she and Mara had once spent together, both fearful for their husbands' lives yet unable to share the burden of their fears because they were too strange to one another. Relly tried in vain to recall Mara's face as it had then been, four long years ago. There was something compulsive in the prematurely aged face of the woman who now sat beside her in the May sunshine, something that banished the memory of its past. At last Relly said:

'No. I feel that I have become an old woman during these years. The features I see when I look in my mirror are those of a stranger, because for some queer reason they have not changed as I have changed.'

Doino looked at her in astonishment. It was true; Relly seemed a young girl, just approaching full maturity, with her smooth, light-brown hair brushed back, her fine white forehead, her clear eyes that seemed for ever to be looking for something far away, her pale skin, taut over her cheekbones, and her chin that was still firmly rounded. Only her hands had changed. They bore the marks of vegetables peeled, laundry washed, floors polished.

'So you've finally given up all idea of going to America?' he asked.

'No. Eli says it will be decided this year whether they're going to surrender to Hitler without a fight or not. If they surrender, we'll leave. If they don't, of course, we must stay here and play our part.'

'What's up with Edi, actually?'

'I don't know. He certainly longs to get back to his biology, but even stronger is his feeling that things can't go on as they are. He's told me that he never goes to sleep without thinking of Hitler and his people, and he's been doing that every night now for years on end. It's as though he were poisoned by his hatred, as though he'd lost his equilibrium. Because he knows hatred is futile. He often meets other men who feel as he does, Josmar's usually among them, and they talk and talk and get worked up. It seems they're trying to work out some new social theory, and then, too, they're planning to start a toy factory on a

co-operative basis. Edi's borrowed some money from his uncle in London, which we could certainly use ourselves. But we mustn't touch it. Edi says it's all for the co-operative.'

She smiled as she said this. She had become reconciled to the fact that her husband, instead of accepting a well-endowed professorship at an American university and thus continuing a career that had begun so brilliantly, should lose himself more and more, a bewitched exile, less conscious of the wretchedness of their daily life than was she.

'Why toys particularly?'

'Well, there are practical reasons. There are other, secret ones concerning which I have never questioned Edi. I think it's good for him to have some secrets from me.'

'Have you no idea what sort of secrets they are?' Mara asked thoughtfully. 'Are they connected with some sort of political project?'

'Probably, but really I don't know. When little Paul doesn't eat properly I become sick with anxiety and worry. But when my husband is so disturbed that he cannot sleep at night and has to get up and walk up and down like a hunted animal, I don't give it a thought. Living in poverty is a full-time occupation, which is something I've only learned since being an émigré.'

Paul called out to them that his boat had reached the shore and they must all come and watch him push it off again. This time it moved away at once with billowing sails and he ran off again to the far side of the pond. Meanwhile more and more children were arriving, accompanied by mothers or governesses. The chairs and benches were all occupied. The cooling breeze had dropped and it was almost as hot as July.

They sat in silence, watching the people stroll by, many in their summer clothes, and the trees, which were just coming into full leaf, and the children playing about the pond. Mara said:

'The children were particularly cruel, cruel as solitary old persons are sometimes cruel, childless, miserly old widowers say. Naturally I had no idea how I ought to lie and I was afraid of falling between the rails. They quickly noticed that. When the train accelerated they crawled up to me and stole everything I had. My food they shared out among themselves and ate at once. Then they went to sleep, as comfortably as if they were in bed. But I didn't dare to sleep and I hung on to the crossbars. I was afraid of moving my head lest I catch it against the wheels. In the morning, when the train stopped at a goods station, I crept out from underneath the carriage. The children were awake now and they all stared at me; they thought I might report them to the railway G.P.U. But they did not really believe I would, which was why

they lay where they were without moving. Ever since then I've been frightened of children.'

This was the first time that Mara had spoken of her escape from Russia. Doino asked:

'Where was that? And what did you do next?'

'The Ukraine. Those *besprizorny* were the last, the others had already gone south. The autumn was over by then, it was snowing, and there was a bitterly cold wind. I found a shed with sliding doors that weren't closed properly, so I could slip inside. It was filled almost to the roof with bales of furs. I climbed up on to them, but I couldn't go to sleep at once because I was too hungry and too tired. I was completely done in.'

'And then?'

'What is the point in talking about it? I only wanted to explain to you why children frighten me. Do you remember, Doino, how we used to dream of bringing hundreds, thousands of children to Dalmatia, of founding socialist children's towns in a socialist state? I dream of that no longer. Weeks later - I was near Odessa then, though I didn't know it - I was suddenly absolutely certain that Vasso was dead. I was wrong, he hadn't even been arrested at the time, but I was certain, and then, well, I decided to give up. That night I put my head on the railway line. No train came, nothing except a little shunting engine, and it stopped before it ran over me. The engineer and his fireman were not young and they looked after me. Their pity was so great that it conquered their fear of the G.P.U. They would even have saved Vasso, but Vasso had stayed in that dark little room, as though he no longer had any right to escape.'

Paul came running. A woman down there was selling ice-cream, 'the best ice-cream in the world, she said so herself'. Mara gave him a coin and he ran off again, but after a few steps he came back, kissed her, cried 'Thank you, thank you, thank you!' and hurried down towards the ice-cream vendor.

'But now, now you're not frightened of children any more, are you?' Relly's question sounded almost humble, as though she were asking for forgiveness.

'I'm afraid of the night, too, but not when I am awake. I don't trust darkness any longer, which is why I cannot sleep before it is light. During my escape the nights were the worst time, thought it was only the darkness that made my escape possible. I had to hide in the daytime. But perhaps what I've just said is not true. Afraid is not the proper word, it's not fear. Tell me the proper word, Doino.'

'There probably is none. Perhaps it is the anguish of solitude and of

being deprived of all future. What is usually called sadness contains within itself the consolations of self-pity. But this particular anguish destroys that pity, it petrifies your heart and immobilises time itself. How can such sadness be separated from the simultaneous fear of being and of not being?

'It is extraordinary,' Mara began again, 'the way what is important becomes confused with what is unimportant. Two thoughts kept me going during my escape: the first, of course, was Vasso; the other was the picture of the ground beneath a fir tree, ground entirely covered with dry, brown pine-needles. When I had escaped I would lie down on those needles and lean my head against the trunk of that tree. Everything would be warm, the earth, the tree, the air. Never in my life have I seen pine-needles as clearly as I then imagined them, never have I felt the warmth of the earth so distinctly. Those were the best moments of the weeks before I met the two men.'

She was thoughtful, and then suddenly said, in another, harder voice:

'Did Djoura tell you that Vasso was cold all the time he was in prison? He died in the cold. Don't forget to put that clearly in your introduction. It's important.'

'I won't forget,' Doino replied, in an attempt to soothe her. 'I shall forget nothing. If only all his manuscripts were here. We must . . .'

She gripped his arm and he followed the direction of her eyes. Two men were walking across the terrace towards the gate by the Observatory. They were both big men, but one of them was particularly broad and heavily built. Slowly she let go his arm, saying:

'Perhaps I am wrong, but that looked to me like . . . though of course I didn't see his face. . . . I want to go back to my hotel now and lie down.'

Doino left the connecting door between the two rooms ajar, since Mara must never be made to feel alone. She could, if she so wished, listen to the men's conversation, or she could read.

Edi had sat down beside the night-table with the lamp. His left profile was thus sharply delineated and Doino noticed, for the first time, that it bore a resemblance to the profile of a famous Viennese musician. Perhaps Edi had changed during the course of this past year – not his body, which remained muscular, hard and broad-boned, but his face, which had become thinner so that it was no longer that of a comfortable, kindly sceptic. The expression in his warm, brown eyes was now almost disagreeable. They burned with the frightful harshness of fanaticism, of cruelty sprung from growing contempt and hatred for the external present.

'So you've abandoned bridge and your faithful pupils, Edi. Why? It was a decent, honest way of making a living after all.'

'When you know our plans, you'll understand why.'

It was Josmar who had answered. He was seated in the middle of the room, for he had to be able to stretch out his damaged leg. The doctors had done what they could for him and his other wounds had all been healed, but this leg remained stiff, so that he had to drag it as he walked. He would remain a cripple. Otherwise he was unchanged, the same big, handsome, blond young man, without line or wrinkle on his rather long face, neither too thin nor yet too broad-shouldered. One of the comrades had said that he reminded him of the Belvedere Apollo, and this had given him the idea for his most recent alias: Pollbel.

These were the plans that Josmar now slowly and methodically unfolded: in some suburb of Paris they would start a toy factory which would produce cheaper and, if possible, better toys of the type which had, up to then, been almost a German monopoly. There was at this time a very good market both in France and elsewhere for well-constructed mechanical playthings. Three skilled craftsmen were available who had already produced some first-class models. They reckoned that shortly after production started the factory would be in a position to employ and support some twenty persons. This alone made the project worth while. There were so many émigrés who belonged to no party or group, who could thus expect no assistance from anyone, and who must therefore pay for their independence by living in a state of poverty which offered them no future whatsoever. It was of primary importance that something be done for these 'independents'. It had been decided that the project would be organised as a co-operative, since this would facilitate somewhat the procurement of the eternal, accursed labour permits. However, though this aspect of their plan was by no means negligible, it was still of only third or fourth rate importance. There was a great deal more to it than just this. The factory should make not inconsiderable profits, and these would be devoted to the production of small, theoretical pamphlets written in a popular style; in these pamphlets concepts would be subject to fresh scrutiny, social facts examined anew; with quiet determination the cause of truth would be served, regardless of threats from any quarter and without consideration for anyone's interests.

But they were also engaged on yet another project of which only three people were aware, he himself, Edi and Georges the technician. This was the invention of very small, radio-controlled wheeled vehicles to be filled with an extra-powerful high explosive. With an operating

range of from 100 to 400 metres, these self-propelled weapons would be infallibly destructive to medium and heavy tanks, no matter how thick their armour. Edi, who was specially preoccupied with the politico-military aspects of this invention, now elaborated his ideas. He finished with the words:

'No doubt all this seems impractical to you, and that I can well understand. All the same, tell us your objections.'

The little street, in which the hotel was situated, was sheltered from the noisy activity of the nearby Boulevard Saint-Michel that went on into the early hours. The inhabitants of this hotel appeared to be quiet people; seldom did a bell ring on one of the landings, and only very rarely was someone called to answer the telephone. Also it was by this time very late.

As they sat there in silence, Doino wondered what some tourist would think should he enter this room by mistake. What would he make of the three men seated there? Would he recognise them as fighters against all ideological enslavement, as toy manufacturers, as the inventors of special gadgets for destruction and assassination, as men engaged on a 'fresh scrutiny of concepts'?

'Why, Edi, have I only just noticed how much your profile resembles that of Gustav Mahler? Have you always looked like him?'

'I've no idea. He's a distant relation on my mother's side.'

Josmar said:

'Now that Austria's gone he's not played anywhere any more. When I think of the *Lied der Erde* . . . All the same, once we've won . . .'

'Be quiet, Josmar,' Edi interrupted, impatiently. 'It's time Doino told us what he thinks and whether he's prepared to come in with us, to take charge of our publications, and later of our periodical. To start with it will appear in German and French; later on there'll be a Spanish, an English, and maybe even a Chinese edition.'

'Whether I'm prepared to come in with you, I don't know. I've only been back here a few days and I'm waiting for Stetten. They've said they'll set him free on condition that he first procures an entry visa for France, and that he leaves Germany within twenty-four hours. The French consulate is being difficult. If he were a Nazi he'd be given a visa right away, but it's not so easy for Jews or anti-Nazis. All the same, I think in his case they may agree. When he does finally get here we are planning to collaborate on a major study of the sociology of modern war. I imagine that that will take up all my time.'

'What? I don't believe you!' cried Edi, jumping to his feet. 'Is that really all you can think of to do? You're planning to back out at this

stage in order to write some superfluous and, moreover, premature work? It's worse than madness, it's desertion in the face of the enemy!

'Sit down, Edi. Let us speak slowly and carefully. After all, we've plenty of time, time to plan for the future and to examine the past as well. Do you remember the summer of 1932, to be specific the first occasion we ever talked together, the night before the *coup d'état* in Prussia? You swore by the rights of the individual, his irreplaceability and absolute uniqueness. I enjoy recalling that conversation. You were so sure of yourself then, as was I of myself, of the Party, of the proletariat in general and the German revolution in particular. And that was only six years ago.'

'Well?'

'Barely two years later, in the February uprising, you so far forgot yourself as to go and fight. And now you've abandoned your concept of the unique, irreplaceable individual together with all your skilful arguments against politics. Politics, you said, on that July evening, were nothing but a series of ill co-ordinated experiments from which no deductions were possible since none was ever repeated. The unexpected and the fortuitous invariably played the major part and were, later, dishonestly alleged to have been essential and natural components of what took place. You, however, were celebrated in biological circles for the brilliant organisation of your experiments, and for the careful wisdom of the deductions which you later drew from them.'

'It's getting late. We always start work early in the morning. I must ask you to come to the point and tell us whether you're willing to work with us or not.'

'To come to the point? Yes, at that time Josmar also wanted me to come to the point, while he wondered which of my words he should "pass on" to the Party authorities so that they might be warned against me. Do you remember, Josmar? It was a few days before Andrei's murder. That was almost, yes, almost seven years ago. To answer your question, Edi Rubin: ever since I have been able to think, only one aspect of men, of things, and of relationships has ever really interested me, and that is their development. When first I was in love I, like all true lovers, was dominated by the feeling of permanence. But I knew from books and from the experience of others that emotions change, and that this eternity would not last. I watched for the first, barely perceptible signs of alteration, which perhaps made their appearance all the sooner in consequence. Somewhat later Stetten taught me always to look for the constant, for that which remains because it does not

change, or rather for that "displaced constant" which develops only in order that it may remain the same.'

'All this is really quite irrelevant to the subject,' put in Josmar, who was also becoming impatient.

'Good for you, Josmar, you still believe in relevance to subjects. And that is exactly what I am getting at. Perhaps the reason we are all lost is that we have all remained the same.'

'What you say is true,' said Edi. 'I have never changed my point of view. I have never believed in the efficacy of the masses to find solutions. Hence the co-operative toy factory and all the rest – it's an appeal to individuals. You and your like, you dreamed of power, which is why your appeal was to the masses, because obviously if there were no wild beasts there would be no animal trainers. You had only one ambition: to be the hammer. And you swindled yourselves and others by alleging that the day you succeeded in becoming the hammer there would be no longer any need for an anvil. You too have remained true to yourself. That is why you refuse to join our community. That is the reason for all this chatter about a "displaced constant"!'.

'I do not refuse, I simply cannot believe that you will succeed. In any society which is compelled increasingly to adopt a military form of organisation, the individual must inevitably cease to be a factor and become instead a negligible *factum*. And that individual has a name: Don Quixote. But there are no windmills any more, there are concentration camps and machine pistols instead. Quixote, taken all in all, was a fortunate man. Were he alive today he would not die in his bed; he'd be shot down by a burst of machine-gun fire between electrified barbed wire fences, and then he'd be shoved underground like a dead cur. Hundreds of thousands of men – tomorrow they will be millions – may well envy Cervantes his prison. Yes, you did well to choose, of all things, toys. There is a parabolic significance there which is attractive to . . .'

'Are you with us? Yes or no.'

' . . . and you'll make little toy cars painted pretty bright colours, the sort you put on a table and they run to the edge but don't fall over because of an automatic built-in gadget that makes them turn round and run the other way. Meanwhile in some little secret workshop you'll be testing your secret anti-tank device. Parables teach us nothing that we do not already know; they simply delight our understanding which always loves to play so long as it is not compelled to despair. But to answer your question. Yes, I am with you provided your undertakings are serious. And I can also probably find you a good mechanic if you need one.'

'If he'll fit in to our community he'll be welcome. Tell him to come and see us.'

'He's not here. I must send for him from Norway. You know him, Josmar. He came to Paris once in order especially to see you and to find out why and how his wife had died. His name is Albert Gräfe and his wife was called Erna.'

'I know,' said Josmar in a constricted voice. He got up with difficulty and his stick trembled in his hand before he leaned his weight upon it. 'Let Gräfe come. Nobody in the world can judge me more harshly than I have already judged myself. Nothing more can touch me, for all my unhappiness lies in the past. It's late, let's go.'

Edi said:

'I never envied you the beliefs which you have meanwhile lost, I do not now envy you the hardness which you have preserved.'

Mara entered the room. She had been listening, at least to the latter part of their conversation. She asked the men to stay a little longer and to drink a glass of wine with her. It seemed as though she wished to give their talk a harmless turn which would provide a more agreeable ending to the evening. But all of a sudden, looking straight at Edi, she asked:

'And how about you? Haven't you grown harder too during these years? And haven't you discovered that soft people are nowadays quite particularly dangerous? Those great men, the accused in the Moscow trials, who played their parts in that shameful farce right through to the end, they needed only one quality to save the revolution, just one - hardness. It is thanks to that lack that the executioners have been enabled to seize power for themselves.'

'No, certainly not,' cried Edi. 'Those murdered men were as pitiless as their murderers.'

Josmar said:

'I remember quite clearly, in Berlin it was, Vasso himself telling me that we had not the right to feel pity. He was a hard man all right, and yet they liquidated him. Forgive me bringing up your husband as an example of what I mean.'

Mara began a sentence which she did not finish. The silence grew painful, and Edi and Josmar finally left.

Mara said:

'If Vasso so definitely refused pity, he must have had a good reason, but I've forgotten what it was.'

'Pity becomes necessary when love is inadequate and justice forgotten. A prerequisite to an acceptance of pity is the renouncement of

love and justice. Vasso refused pity because he wanted the age of renouncement to be over.'

'And suppose he was wrong, Doino? Imagine for a moment - if he was wrong?'

'You needn't worry, he wasn't wrong. If some other man, in fifty or a hundred and fifty years' time, should think exactly as he did and die exactly the same death, that man would not be wrong either. In each generation there must be a few men who live as though their age were not a beginning and an end, but an end and a beginning.'

'But if Vasso had believed he could be wrong he would not have dared to renounce pity.'

'Go back to bed, Mara. And if you can't sleep, invent toys. We're starting a new career. Its prospects look good, a toy is far more likely to catch on than a new gospel. People believe they know all about new gospels long before they have even been created, and they have forgotten them before ever they have understood them. Apart from that, all apostles . . .'

'I don't want to interrupt you,' said Mara, 'but I think I should tell you right away I wasn't mistaken, the man in the Luxembourg was Slavko. Here, take the paper.'

On the front page of the evening paper, beneath a three-column headline and a lengthy subhead, there was an article on the International Police Congress, called for the purpose of exchanging knowledge gained from experience in combating crime. The article was accompanied by a group photograph, the front row seated, the two back rows standing. They were mostly men of middle age, all dressed in civilian clothes, the majority smiling amiably. Beneath the photograph was a key, giving names from top to bottom and from left to right, and among these were Miroslav Hrvatic. Yes, near the left of the third row stood Slavko, the notorious commissioner of the Yugoslav political police. There was not much to look at about him, since his features in the photograph were indistinct; all that could be seen for sure was that he was a big, heavily-built man. He was the only one who held his briefcase in front of his chest as though it were a shield.

'Yes, you were right. Now go and sleep, Mara.'

He heard her get into bed and switch the light off. He read for a little longer, stopping every now and then to listen; her breathing was regular and perhaps she was asleep. He undressed slowly. In bed he tried to read again, but one thought kept coming between himself and his book. At first it seemed to him impossible, then improbable, and finally he was certain that it was true: Mara had determined to kill Slavko. He

got up, went to her bedroom, and stood beside her bed. No, she was not asleep, she was just pretending. She was surely working out the details of the assassination and she did not wish to be disturbed. If he were to ask her she would simply deny having any such intention.

He left her room, dressed and made his way to the café at the corner of the boulevard. Despite the freshness of the night air, the young men and girls preferred to sit on the terrace and he had difficulty in finding a table. Fragments of conversation reached him. A couple were seated to his right, a young, rather plump girl with badly-dyed red hair and a man who looked somewhat older, being perhaps aged twenty-eight or so. He talked without pause. His line was one that he had obviously used many times before, and as a seducer he entertained no doubts concerning his success. But the girl was not really listening. She kept glancing towards the street that led to the Pantheon.

On his left two tables had been pulled together and around them a group of young men and girls were seated very close to one another. They were discussing surrealism, the revolutionary spirit and Russia. One of them suddenly said, loud and firmly:

'And I insist that the Dnieprostroi dam is a synthesis of surrealism and revolution. It is the beginning of a new age. And for me the important thing is that I belong to it.'

'How about the G.P.U.?' someone interjected. The original speaker replied:

'The G.P.U.? If the revolution hadn't invented it, surrealism would have had to. I repeat, I've made my choice.'

They play at forest fires on the well-kept lawns of the Luxembourg, and they believe that they know what it is all about. The corrupted revolution gives them toys, surrealist joujoux made of human bones. That café across the way was Lenin's favourite once upon a time. He used to say that a revolutionary must dream with his eyes open. He would come from the library, tired, with his books and his papers under his arm, and would sit down on that terrace, with the Pantheon behind, the tip of the Eiffel visible far away in front, the Luxembourg gardens spread out before him, and he would dream with his eyes open. But not of the G.P.U.

One of the young men was saying:

'The very fact that Stalin doesn't give the appearance of greatness is proof enough for me that he is the greatest man of the century, if not of all history.'

'I shall let Mara do as she wishes,' thought Doino. Obviously the time was past when a shot could stir the conscience of the world. The

people wanted to play, not to listen, and it did not worry them that they should have to share their age, their town, their gardens with the Slavkos of this world. Mara's act would change nothing, but she would have paid her personal debt and her last act would be significant, would be what Stetten had once called a moral necessity.

The next morning Mara asked him to move at once to another hotel. She was quite well aware that he knew her reasons for making this request, but she said:

'When my aunt arrives she'll want to move into your room at once. Also please leave me entirely alone for the next few days. You see, I need solitude.'

He replied, without looking at her:

'It is essential to remember the consequences. There would be immediate arrests over there.'

'They are bound to begin again in any event. Your argument is valueless and there is no better, as well you know.'

She kissed him, as though she were about to set off on a long journey.

'Don't be frightened on my account,' she said.

He did not answer, for words had become quite useless.

There was no need for her to answer or even to listen. All she had to do was to interject an occasional 'Yes, indeed,' or 'I quite agree, *Made-moiselle*,' into the shopgirl's uninterrupted flow of chatter. Customers were rare at this hour of the day: they were either still lunching or, at most, were drinking their post-prandial coffee. Not until four o'clock would business begin to pick up again. Thus the girl had no objection to Mara's lingering in the shop. She was fully satisfied with Mara's explanation of her presence, that she was waiting for her husband to come out of the hotel across the way, because she wished to see whether he was alone or accompanied by a certain lady. This gave the saleswoman a chance for ample development on the theme of masculine behaviour, during the course of which she drew numerous and not unintelligent parallels between her own experiences and those of other ladies of her acquaintance. All these led inexorably to one conclusion: men, all men, even the most feeble, lived in a 'frenzy' of unfaithfulness. Such was, alas, the nature of the male, and there was nothing that could be done about it whatever; it was a fact that simply had to be faced, like growing old. She was called *Adèle*, like her flower-shop – or perhaps the shop was named after her – and she was able to enrich her argument with anecdotes concerning men in their capacity of flower purchasers.

The choice they made, it seemed, indicated the degree of their frenzy.

'For example, one man buys a half dozen red roses, another a potted azalea, and you might think that that was just a matter of taste. Not a bit of it, Madame, now I can tell you . . .'

Mara kept glancing from the windows of his room to the hotel entrance. She knew he was there. She had last seen him at half-past twelve, at the window. He had appeared several times, first of all in shirtsleeves, finally in his jacket. So now he was presumably in the restaurant downstairs.

It was only when the garrulous Adèle said suddenly: 'But, madame, here is your husband!' that she turned and saw him. He was standing close beside her, his hand held out as though he were about to touch her arm.

He addressed her in Croat, bowing down to kiss her hand. He went on: 'I chose to leave my hotel by the back door, walked around the block, and have thus the pleasure of an entirely surprise meeting.'

This was the first time that she saw Slavko close to. He had a large, fleshy, red face with clever, bloodshot eyes. He smelt of strong drink, though normally, she had heard, he got drunk on wine. He said:

'We will stop by this evening, Mademoiselle. Please be so kind as to put a good azalea on one side for us.'

He pushed Mara gently towards the door. She wished to free her arm, but this he would not let her do as he led her towards the nearby Bois de Boulogne. When her handbag fell open, accidentally as it seemed, he cried out:

'No, it's not possible! Do you mean to say that you walk about Paris with a gun? My French colleagues would certainly take a very serious view of that. They went to so much trouble, even going so far as to arrest some thirty of our compatriots, in order to make certain I could enjoy the *ville lumière* in peace, and then along comes a little woman with a loaded revolver, a good if somewhat old-fashioned Steyr, without so much as a safety catch. . . . A bit of luck I met you! There, I've unloaded it for you, that's better. Really, what an excellent housewife you are. You obviously bought such a lot of bullets because, as we all know, they're cheaper by the dozen. There we are then, now we'll snap shut this nice-looking little handbag of yours and forget about the whole thing, shall we? You never possessed a loaded revolver, you never stood waiting for two whole days, to begin with in the lobby of the hotel, then in the bookshop, today first of all in the doorways of numbers 18, 22 and 24, and finally in the flower-shop called Adèle.

We've forgotten all about it, no part of it ever happened. And now we're going to sit down on this little bench. Yes, you sit there, then you can look to the left and instead of my ugly policeman's face you can see the dear little lake and the dear little island with the dear little lovers' café.'

Mara said, violently:

'Go away! Get away from me at once! Or I'll scream for help.'

Yet even as she spoke she noticed two men standing at the far end of the path. She looked the other way and there, too, were a couple of police agents.

'I myself,' he began, 'have never carried a gun. I wouldn't like to have to rely on my own ability as a marksman. Nor have I ever killed anyone, that's not my style. Only fools commit murder – I beg your pardon, present company of course excepted. And incidentally, generally speaking, it's only fools who get murdered too. Take for example Cerenic, the man you killed that time, he was nothing but a stupid brute. Which is why I made absolutely no effort to "solve" that particular case. And the fact that you could shoot so well left-handed – yes, you held the pistol in your left hand when you killed him, someone was watching you know – that increased the already considerable respect I felt for you, madame. On the other hand, when I say that only fools get murdered, you must realise that that is just my way of talking. It's not true, quite a lot of people who are far from stupid become murderers. Your late husband, for example, was far from being a fool – I'm prepared to stake my official reputation on that – and yet they murdered him. Had I been in a position to arrest him he would be alive today. In gaol, but alive. He'd have had a cell all to himself, books – in fact, a proper life. I would never have allowed him to be maltreated. Why should I have even wanted him to be? I would have respected him and his future. Always respect the future, that's what I say. In our age strange things can happen, indeed frequently have happened, men have been taken from prison to head the government, or at least to be Minister of the Interior. Believe you me, madame, being a member of the political police is by no means all beer and skittles. Take, for example, my celebrated colleague, the former head of the G.P.U., Heinrich Yagoda. Dead! Dead as a doornail! No, the bosses nowadays are a thankless lot, a disreputable bunch when you get to know them. Or take you. Suppose I had let you have a shot at me? Have you thought what would have happened, in court I mean? They'd have asked about your late husband, and you'd have been bound to tell them that he was condemned to death in Moscow. Then someone would

have shouted at you: "In that case why, if you must shoot somebody, why don't you shoot one of those gentry in Russia instead of assassinating a worthy employee of the Royal Yugoslavian civil service"?"

He laughed aloud and then went on:

'Perhaps you are wondering what I am laughing at. It's an old joke I've just remembered. A man is looking for his briefcase under a street lamp in Jelacic Place. Another man helps him look for it, but they can't find it. Finally this second man asks the other: "You're sure you lost your briefcase here?" "No," he says, "I lost it in the little wood behind Tuskanac, but I thought I'd look for it here on account of the light being better." What do you think of my joke? You see the point? He lost it in the dark wood but thought he'd look for it in the middle of the city. They killed your husband in Moscow, so you come to Paris to murder me, a fellow countryman of yours.'

'Leave me alone. Go away, go away at once.'

'You're quite right, madame, I'm wasting my time. The session's already begun, too, and it's probably an interesting one what's more, about measures to put down white slavery in collaboration with the League of Nations. You, on the other hand, I find a bore and a rude bore at that. So please tell me in a few well-chosen words what objection you have to my continuing to live a few years longer. You are certainly not acting on Party orders, since, first, you were expelled from the Party exactly a week ago today - perhaps you haven't yet been told, and I am both honoured and pleased that I should be the one to apprise you of the fact; and secondly, the Party, thank God, is most definitely opposed to any such individual acts. So what are you after? I suggest you compare the figures for Communists killed or imprisoned by us with those similarly treated in the Fatherland of the Proletariat of the World. All right, it's too bad that Andrei Bocek and Hrvoje Brankovic happened to be close friends of yours. But just think that thanks to me, yes, thanks to me, they are now dead heroes of the movement. If I'd let them live a little longer they'd have been murdered in Moscow, along with your husband, and in the Party's official publication it would have been categorically stated that they were the scum of the earth, that they were traitors who had sold themselves to me body and soul. Anyhow, I'm really beginning to be thoroughly bored by you, so I'll just tell you one thing, as one compatriot to another, you understand. Ever since the Ustachis assassinated King Alexander in Marseilles my French colleagues have been very sensitive. All the same, I didn't choose to rely entirely on this French sensitivity, and I brought a

few of my paladins along with me, well-educated young men with a good knowledge of French and such excellent manners that you might take them for the sort of young men who get kept by the elderly widows of business executives. You can see two of them from where you are now sitting, that's right, one at each end of this path with a French collegue at his side. They will accompany you home and will examine your lodgings. One will remain with you, though not for long. You see, I'm giving you the kid-glove treatment. I've never forgotten that my Uncle Peter had the honour of being hacked to pieces by the sabre of your ill-tempered grandfather, nor that my maternal grandfather served in your great-uncle's house. Your great-uncle, in his bluff old military way, used frequently to strike his servants if they did anything that displeased him. I kiss your hand, madame, and I'd advise you to remember what I've said: don't go looking in the town for something that you mislaid in the woods.'

The young policeman took over the room that had previously been Doino's. He insisted that the connecting door be kept open at all times; the door from Mara's room on to the corridor he had locked at once and had put the key in his pocket. Four times a day one of Slavko's men came with food, newspapers and books. Mara's guard was taciturn and read without interruption – first of all the beginning and then the end of each book, and finally the part in the middle. Apart from that peculiarity, his seemed to be a patient nature. On the evening of the second day, just before he left, he said to Mara politely:

'You haven't asked for my advice, but I can tell you that it wasn't a very good idea to attempt to get Slavko here in Paris. At home all you'd have to do would be to go to the *Red Ox* at about eleven any evening – say half-past, just to be on the safe side – the back room on the left, and you'd be able to shoot him before he could even say boo. Don't misunderstand my motives, Madame Militch, in telling you this; I have no interest in the matter, it makes no difference to me whether you shoot him or not, since I can't expect any promotion either way. But it always distresses me when I read in books the fuss that people make about these matters. Here, for instance, you gave yourself away completely, before even you began, by asking the secretariat of the congress for the name of Slavko's hotel. That alone was the height of folly. Say what you will, the easiest place to get rid of people is in their own home. Why? Because it's according to human nature, except maybe in the case of kings or dictators. Well, here's your key. You can go wherever you like and take potshots at anyone you fancy. I kiss your hand, Madame Militch.'

CHAPTER II

No, there was nothing in Stetten's appearance to show that he had suffered; he seemed to be in very good spirits, constantly cheerful, always on the move, going to bed late and getting up early. He was like some naughty schoolboy on the first day of his summer holidays who has managed to forget the hated classroom and the distant threat of another school year looming in the future.

When he spoke of his imprisonment he did so without complaint, almost with pride, as though relating a story of obstacles surmounted. His grand-daughter he never now mentioned, nor the child's mother to whom he owed his freedom.

From time to time the professor would speak to Doïno about beginning their work together; of course they would make a serious start in the very near future. Meanwhile, however, his books had not yet arrived, and so they must wait a little longer. The baroness, who had accompanied him to Paris, had left with Mara. Since her departure Stetten spent a great deal of time with an elderly married couple whom he had looked up shortly after his arrival in Paris. The husband had to go abroad for a few weeks – to visit a celebrated numismatist whose principal occupation was being a monarch. So Stetten squired his wife, accompanying her wherever she went, and assisting her in her efforts to obtain entry visas for the United States. He thoroughly enjoyed this new rôle and, in consequence, tended to neglect Doïno, who often did not see the professor for days on end. But his happiness did not last. Thanks to the intervention of the royal numismatist the Viennese couple soon obtained all their permits. It was agreed that Stetten would join them in the near future. Paris was to be the jumping-off place, where he would pass the last lap of his life in Europe. He would stay there a few months, at most half a year, in order to complete the necessary formalities for himself and for Doïno, who was definitely coming with him.

The professor knew this city from his student days, having studied here for two terms and having frequently revisited it for periods of a few days in order to examine the documents and old records in the archives of the specialist libraries. The beauty and gaiety of the city had not failed to appeal to his senses, but he had then been so preoccupied

with his work that Paris, for him, had remained the city of dry-as-dust research and laborious historiography. As he grew older he became less and less interested in the concept of his science as a systematic arrangement of events, and more and more preoccupied with the search for history's significance in the evolution of its social factors; as a result of this change of emphasis he lost contact with his French colleagues. He was in the habit of describing those men as: 'Useful, very useful, but too German, too much the way Germans would like to be and almost never are.' Half seriously and half in jest he would criticise the French as being 'Franks, far too *Fränkisch*'.

It was not until the married lady had left for the United States that he looked up those colleagues with whom he had corresponded for decades. He derived a stimulus from each of those meetings. It was pleasant to be thus greeted with open arms, to be made to feel that his visit had been eagerly awaited these many years. Stetten did not fail to realise that the friendliness of his reception was, for reasons of politeness, somewhat exaggerated, but he was none the less grateful for this. It did him good to be reminded that he was not just another refugee who every ten days had to pass long, humiliating hours at the police station in order to receive an extension to his *permis de séjour*.

In any case he was soon able to give up these periodic trips to the police station. One of his colleagues had finally persuaded a high official at the Foreign Ministry to arrange that he be given a proper identity card. This official, an expert on Central European questions, had a lengthy, detailed conversation with Stetten, during the course of which he attempted to persuade the professor that Hitler would only be dangerous so long as he was 'on the prowl', and that he would eventually settle down. Then, perhaps in the near future, perhaps already now, he would stop menacing the vital European balance of power; he would automatically lose his dynamism since common sense would tell him that he had no more claims to make and nothing more to gain. In reply to a carefully framed question he assured the professor that these were simply his own personal views. But the tone in which he gave this assurance inevitably implied that his personal views were not without weight when it came to taking those important decisions that his country might be called upon to make. The conversation ended, as it had begun, with an interchange of polite banalities.

'The man is clearly an intelligent, cultured person. He's only a fool when he talks about foreign affairs, particularly about matters concerning Central Europe. Do you believe he could possibly have any influence with his Minister?'

'Blindness isn't the same as stupidity,' replied Doino, 'even though of the two it is the more dangerous. The vast majority of the French people need this type of blindness; from it they derive their daily ration of hope, the hope that they can continue to be a great power without fighting a war, even without offering any resistance to their enemies. They live in the belief that another miracle of the Marne will occur – this time without a war. What they'll get will be a war and no miracle. The wisdom of La Fontaine's fables – misapplied, what's more – is hardly a satisfactory basis for policy in the twentieth century.'

'And old story for us. When a nation begins to decline, its old and tried beliefs become sources of the most dangerous types of folly. But let us think of ourselves first of all. If that man was really giving a true picture of French policy, then we should leave here this week. Dion, start packing the trunks!'

'Nothing is certain as yet,' remarked Doino. 'Besides, you like being here. We both belong to the category of people who always flee too late. A man may be untrue to his most excellent qualities; he usually remains faithful to his errors. The Gestapo can rely on catching us here in Paris.'

They both laughed, as though this were a good joke. The irony of events did not cease to delight them, even though they were themselves its victims.

Professor Raoul Werlé, a specialist in European history of the second half of the nineteenth century, was one of Stetten's few French colleagues whom he saw more than once. They had known each other in Vienna where Werlé, who was only nine years younger than Stetten, had studied for some time. He was an Alsatian by origin, and German was his mother tongue. Called up into the German army at the beginning of the war, he had fled to Switzerland, though it was not until 1916 that he had openly espoused the cause of France.

Both men now found greater pleasure in one another's company than formerly. They frequently took their meals together, went for walks, had many heated arguments, often quarrelled, after which they would send one another little express letters, the so-called *pneus*, in which each would gallantly claim full responsibility for the misunderstanding. It was a friendship as between boys, elderly boys.

This friendship lasted for a few weeks before becoming noticeably cooler. Many factors contributed to its decline: differences of opinion concerning political and military matters, Paul of Samosata, the character of Athanasius, the credibility of St. Gregory of Tours, the right

of the workers to a forty-hour week with paid holidays, the Dreyfus affair, the personality of the author or authors of the Iliad and the Odyssey. But the final cause of their rupture was the appearance of Albert Gräfe. Stetten was immediately and strongly attracted to Gräfe and professed great faith in his powers of judgment. Werlé did not conceal his disappointment after his first meeting with Gräfe. He found nothing in the working-man to interest him. Stetten did not forgive him this opinion.

Werlé invited Doino to luncheon with the purpose of discovering the secret of the powerful influence which this 'sinister individual' exercised over Stetten. He thus learned Albert's history; how he had been handed over to the enemy and tortured by the Gestapo, how he had been abandoned by his friends, insulted and humiliated, how he had finally summoned up the courage to escape from the concentration camp for the single reason that he wished to discover the truth. As an émigré, too, Albert had shown himself to possess a fine, strong and indomitable character; this Stetten knew, and he was naturally not unimpressed.

'I cannot see,' was Werlé's comment, 'why a man should be valued according to the quality or even the intensity or the experiences he has undergone. So far as I can make out he's just a simple working-class man, not stupid, I grant you, but not educated either. I imagine he's simply more stubborn than the average and, I fear, more narrow-minded as well. And those qualities have so impressed your old teacher that he's prepared to spend hours with Monsieur Gräfe and to listen to him as though he had God knows what new truths to learn from him?'

'The events of the past few years have led Stetten to examine men from this point of view: can their characters stand up to the increasing pressures of the age? Love of truth alone is no longer enough to confer value upon a man.'

Werlé had decided that he would drink little during this meal; one carafe of wine should suffice. But he became excited, talked more and with greater emphasis than was his custom, and thus soon had to order a second carafe, and then a third. He was not poor, nor was he really a miser, but he made a point of never exceeding his planned daily budget. And this was a perfectly clear case: Faber was too poor to be able to return his hospitality. On the other hand, the restaurant was fortunately an inexpensive one and thus the bill should be reasonable. However, if they continued to drink wine at this rate, it would mean that Werlé's evening meal would be limited to bread and butter and a cup of hot chocolate. This prospect caused the Frenchman to become increasingly

ill-humoured, for he was particularly fond of a good dinner. But there was nothing he could do about it now. Faber had a trick of emptying his glass, almost absentmindedly as it were, while he talked. One might think that wine was as cheap as water. It was annoying, particularly as Werlé had no alternative but to refill the empty glass.

'If there is one thing I don't care for,' said Werlé, ending his lengthy and hastily marshalled arguments, 'it's the confusion of causes with motives. In the old days everything about Stetten was crystal clear, sometimes almost too clear. Now he's filled with confusion. Will you tell me, for instance, what earthly interest he can have in Paul of Samosata? In the first place, he's never had anything to do with the third century; in the second place, his great number – I might say his excessive number – of special interests have never been remotely connected with the history of Christianity; thirdly . . .'

'What did he say about this Paul, then?' Doino asked in an amused tone of voice. He emptied his glass once again.

'Say? That is hardly the word for it. He produced a complete theory in defence of that patriarch of Antioch who, you will remember, was driven from his place in ridicule and contempt. He made a hero out of him, a figure larger than lifesize. He talked about Trotskyism and Stalinism in connection with the quarrels of churches and sects in the third and fourth centuries. He maintained that all the true Christians were drowned in a of flood execrable slander. He even seemed to be in favour of the Ebionites – can you imagine anything more preposterous? What has Trotsky got to do with a priest of Antioch? And, *a fortiori*, what has Church History of the third century got to do with a specialist of the fifteenth and sixteenth? And finally, who knows anything definite about Paul, anyhow? The few lines in Eusebius hardly entitle one to make more than the vaguest suppositions.'

'Well, yes,' said Doino. 'I grant you we don't know much about him. The conquerors have always falsified history, priestly conquerors more so even than the other sort, since in their case the maintenance of power is inextricably involved with their ideas. But before going on, might I suggest that we drink a bottle of good Beaujolais together? You see I got paid this morning. I'm what they call a ghost-writer. I publish under well-known names that are not my own. So today I'm a rich man. And whenever I find myself discussing Church History I get a most remarkable thirst for red Burgundy. This is one confusion of cause and motive for which I hope you will forgive me.'

'But my dear friend, I beg you, you're my guest. I wouldn't dream of allowing such a thing, it's on me.'

'No, no, my dear professor, this is all a misunderstanding; it is I who invited you. You knew that, and that is why you tactfully chose such a cheap restaurant. When it's your turn you know perfectly well that we'll eat in a very different sort of place.'

'Most certainly you must be my guest next time. But to get back to the subject! Tell me the truth, was it you who told Stetten all this stuff about Paul of Samosata? Ha! ha! ha! I find that a capital joke: you, a Jew and a Communist, attempting to rehabilitate the reputation of some third century patriarch! Incidentally, you're quite right about the Burgundy. It goes very well with a discussion of this sort.'

'A man travelling in the mountains,' Doino began in a voice that was now entirely serious, 'knows that he must often go a long way before he will reach a place from which he can truly see his point of departure, before he can form any real idea of the shape of the place from which he started out. The two points are divided, or if you prefer it joined, by a valley. We are the first historically conscious generation which has had to live in a condition of permanent catastrophe, on the edge of abysses which somehow come together to form only one abyss. It is true that our knowledge concerning the story of the patriarch is both limited and vague, and yet we know what happened there as well as if we had witnessed it all ourselves. Seventy men of the church signed his deposition, unanimously as it were, but it was only three years later, when the heathen emperor Aurelian intervened, that Paul actually had to leave. Under pressure of the Roman soldiery and the Roman secret police the faithful made cowardice their prime article of faith and betrayed the good shepherd who had fought to protect them during three long years.'

'Forgive me for saying so, but you're . . . you're absolutely out of your mind! Where do you get all this from? And once again, what's it got to do with you?'

'But fifty years later, at the Council of Nicæa, the doctrine of consubstantiality, which the Synod of Antioch had damned as heresy, was accepted. And a contrary myth was now created concerning Paul of Samosata in which were collected together all the accusations which he could, with far more right, have levelled against his enemies. Does not that remind you of something which we have experienced in our own time? Something that we are witnessing every day?'

'No, certainly not. And what is more, you're not a specialist on the third century either.'

'No, I'm a political refugee.'

'Remarkable. One hears all the time about the misery of the

émigrés, and one imagines that you'd all be weighed down by the troubles of your everyday life. And then all of a sudden it appears you can't sleep because of the alleged wrong done by the Church to some dissident priest seventeen hundred years ago.'

'It's not as remarkable as you appear to think. The state of being an émigré engenders a general allergy to all injustice and all humiliation. Political refugees start to look for allies in forgotten graves when they can't find allies, or sufficient allies, or sufficiently courageous allies, among their contemporaries.'

'I'd rather not listen to this sort of talk, just as I'd rather not look at obscene pictures – they excite me to no purpose. Let us get back to that working-man, that Gräfe. Basically you know as little about him as you do about the former patriarch of Antioch. Because——' Werlé raised one finger in a warning gesture and then forgot to lower it again. He was becoming somewhat heated by the wine, which he had drunk too quickly. 'Because it is fallacious to believe that motives can be deduced from actions. That is why I always say that the historian's business is with facts and conditions, with causes at most, and never with motives. You follow me?'

Doino nodded. The waiter, who was watching these last two guests, brought over a fresh bottle.

Werlé leaned far forward so that his chest was almost parallel to the tablecloth, his large, bald head nearly touching Doino.

'I'll tell you something that I've never told anybody else.' He was speaking in German now. 'I left Strasbourg in October, 1914, and went to Switzerland. Why, I ask you, why? Because I hated the Kaiser? Nonsense. Of course I didn't care for the Kaiser, but for that reason – no, no! If we'd had a plebiscite at that time I wouldn't have voted, not for Germany, not for France, not for anybody. Now listen carefully, my dear colleague!'

The story he told was a simple, sentimental one which he spun out at great length. He had always been frightened of women, but as a young man he had fallen in love with the wife of a successful solicitor. She was both older and more experienced than her timid suitor. She soon recognised his feelings for her, even though he never expressed them. When war broke out the solicitor volunteered for the army and went off to the front. Werlé was able to visit her more frequently, and though he still did not 'betray' his feelings for her a 'certain state of soul' came into existence between them. And then one evening, when he was in her house, a telegram arrived summoning the wife to the deathbed of her mortally wounded husband.

'Naturally I took her to the station. And then suddenly I thought to myself: now the fat's in the fire, this woman will marry me and I'll have to spend the rest of my life with her. You've no idea how frightened I was; in novels it's always the other way around, about men being scared they *won't* get one particular woman. Well, to cut a long story short, the next day it was confirmed, the husband had died. That same evening I went to Bâle. As time went by I had to find some reason when people asked me why I'd done it. In any case I preferred France to Germany. So to put it briefly I became a national hero. Ask anyone you like, you can read it in lots of books. I'm a typical representative of the men of Alsace, who as soon as war broke out and so on and so forth. And now answer me truthfully' – he was speaking French again but with a marked Alsatian accent – 'admit that you have no idea why this Albert Gräfe behaved so splendidly. And you want to explain Paul of Samosata's psychology to me! Ha, ha, ha!'

Doino did not reply, for there was no purpose in pursuing the conversation. Besides, it was high time he was going. He wanted to stop by the library and find a few books that would teach him something about the third century. It was true that he had in his time read a considerable amount about the early centuries of the Christian era, but never with great attention, and now he suddenly found the gaps in his knowledge intolerable. He must lose no time in filling them; two or three weeks intensive reading should enable him to clarify his ideas. He had long given up resisting the urge to study; it was a sensation akin to an abhorrent vacuum in himself that made life unbearable until he had stopped it by learning about some distant or near-at-hand subject.

Just as they were saying good-bye to one another two Salvation Army girls came walking down the boulevard. They carried baskets filled with Bibles in all languages which they were trying to sell, at very low prices, to the passers-by whose thoughts were clearly far removed from matters of religion. They rewarded Doino with a grateful smile when he bought no less than three – one in German, one in French, and one in English. The elder of the two, as she counted out his change, assured him:

'With it you're bound to find the true path.

The younger added, eagerly:

'Salvation is promised to everyone, everyone.

Then both gazed into his face, and he did not want to disappoint them. He said: 'In any case, I must thank you. You two ladies have done what you can for my soul.'

In the library catalogues he noted some ten books that he certainly

must read before he could form even a superficial idea of the period that interested him. He took them home under his arm, for he had no briefcase with him. The day was drawing to a close. He would pay a quick visit to Stetten, who lived nearby, and would cancel his meeting with Edi and Josmar. He did not wish to be disturbed.

It was a long room and not too narrow. A screen separated one-third – kitchen and washroom combined – from the rest. The furniture was simple, of a restrained ugliness: there was a bed, a night table, a larger table, three chairs on one of which stood the radio, an old armchair whose original colour was now unrecognisable, a cupboard the door of which tended to stick, and a hanging mirror which gave maliciously distorted reflections. The wallpaper depicted, with a startling realism, tropical flora in all its luxuriance. At the sight of those outrageous plants even the gentlest man might long for a machine gun with which to drill them full of holes. Yet none did so, for nobody assassinates ugliness.

Before the window stood a tree, behind whose foliage could be discerned a perspective of house-backs. Doino had christened this lime 'the forgotten tree'. It made up for a great deal. Sometimes birds sang in its branches, and when the sun shone again after a storm raindrops glistened and shone upon its leaves. It was as though the tree gave out an unending goodness which softly filled the room, a deliberate consolation for its ugliness.

During the day the table stood against the window, so that whenever Doino glanced up he was looking at his tree-top. Now, since it was dark, he pulled it back to the centre of the room, beneath the light. He opened the Bible at the beginning of the New Testament. Matthew started with the list, incomplete incidentally, of the thrice fourteen generations which separated Abraham from Jesus. The evangelist was intent on proving Jesus' title as David's successor, on showing that he was legitimately *Mechiakh ben David*. Lacking this proof all that followed must be open to question. All was well, Joseph, Mary's husband, was of the house of David as the first seventeen verses made clear. But the last eight verses made it plain that Jesus was nowise Joseph's son. So what was the point of giving Joseph's genealogy? And why, in the twenty-third verse, did Matthew misquote Isaiah? The prophet had never mentioned a child born to a virgin; he had simply said that the child's mother would be a young woman. There were further inaccuracies. Isaiah had prophesied an Immanuel, while Mary's son was called Ieshu.

Doino looked among his books. Yes, there it was, the Syrian translation, which was certainly both older and more accurate than the Greek. Here the genealogy finished: 'Jacob begat Joseph. Joseph, who espoused the Virgin Mary, begat Jesus who was called the Anointed (*Mechiakh*).' And in verse twenty-five of the Syrian translation he read: '... and he took unto himself a wife and she bore him a son and he called him Jesus'. Luke also spoke of Joseph as Jesus' father.

He continued to read Matthew with care and suspicion. Either this evangelist was a man of improbable ignorance, or else he had distorted the texts from which he drew his material. Doino opened the Old Testament which, as a child, he had learned to read in Hebrew. Yes, there it was, the word was *netzer*, a rod, that was it. *And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots.* That was what Isaiah had written. And on this was based the establishment in Nazareth of Jesus' family . . . *that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene.* But the Hebrew word for Nazarene is *notzri*. Also, how had the writer dared to ascribe a misquotation to Jesus? *Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy.* Nowhere was there any reference to hating thine enemy.

Years, decades indeed, had passed since the death of the Apostle Paul, yet they still dared to assert that the Saviour had come not to destroy the Law but to fulfil it. And meanwhile they themselves were doing all in their power to destroy the Law. They were opening the gates to the heathen and were denying the Law with their every act.

Many years before Doino had read the Gospels, with care though without passionate interest. Now he found his reading utterly absorbing, for he read in terms of other events, in the light of his own age, and beneath the shadow of a history in which he was himself involved. He checked the references to the Old Testament, followed quotations back to their original context and found the distortions which he thus uncovered to be quite monstrous.

What had been the assumption at the time the Gospels were written? That the Old Testament would be forgotten? That it would be lost?

And another conclusion he drew was even more disquieting. Countless scholars had studied these texts and they, too, must have found these discrepancies. Had that shaken their faith? Had it even caused them the slightest anxiety? Apparently not. These problems, on which Doino had stumbled more or less by accident, were of course nothing new. They must be known to every theologian. Every protestant family possessed its Bible, in which they read from the time of their earliest

childhood. And did not the first chapter of Matthew raise any doubts? 'Stillborn doubts,' Doino said aloud. The conquerors need have no doubts: men thirsting for faith will cherish no doubts.

He stood by the window while the air grew gradually cooler and the houses lay beneath the waning moon like huge petrified animals, like the immutable past. Only in one window was there a light. He could see a man and a woman, both almost naked, walking about in the room; now they were moving towards one another and their gestures were such that they might either be about to come to blows or on the point of making passionate love. Doino looked away, not out of modesty but because he had long ago lost all interest in private lives, because all that he now wanted to know was the meaning behind the appearance. The multiple variety of action might be amusing, but that did not conceal the fact that it was only too frequently meaningless. Whether the couple in the lighted room should fight one another as though struggling for their very lives, or whether they should now embrace, either action would only reveal once again the monotonous poverty of life's meaning. There was no sense in watching them, there was no sense in listening to Werlé talking about his private life. They were figures drawn in the sand with a trembling forefinger – soon the tide would cover them . . . or the wind would blow. . . .

'Tell me you're pleased to see me! Because here I am, a welcome guest no doubt.'

It was Karel. He was carrying a suitcase and he walked unsteadily towards the table, where he glanced at the books lying open.

'Aha! So you're preparing a new career for yourself, planning to be a miracle-rabbi or a cardinal, I suppose. Well, why don't you say you're pleased to see me? Why don't you offer me something? A chair, say, or a bed.'

'A year ago, in Rouen, we said good-bye to one another for ever. We have nothing more to add now,' replied Doino without looking at him.

Karel opened his case and took out a bundle, a sleeping-bag. He spread it on the floor beside the bed, took off his jacket, hung it carefully over the back of a chair, placed his tie on top of the jacket, put his shoes side by side at the foot of the bed, and finally crawled into the sleeping-bag. He put his hands behind his head and examined the wallpaper. At last he said:

'I'm a sick man. For the last two days I've been unable to keep any food down. Everything I swallow I bring up again at once. I have vomited my soul out of my body. Being sick, I've come to you. I can't bear to be alone.'

'Go to your friends, your Party friends,' said Doino.

He would have liked to add some cruel remark, but did not do so. Now he realised for the first time that Karel really did look sick. His face was pale and yellowish in colour, there were drops of perspiration on his dome-shaped brow and his fleshy nose seemed as though stuck on to a face which was that of a starving fat man.

'Go to your friends,' repeated Doino, though with less force.

'Friends? Who has friends any more? When I was eight years old I was playing with my friend Petar on the bank of a stream. He had hidden in the rushes and I was looking for him. I pushed him, by mistake you understand, and he fell into the water. I ought to have shouted for help, but I was frightened. Then it was too late. I've never had another friend. If Petar were still alive I wouldn't have had to come to you.'

'Are you feverish?'

'No, there's nothing wrong with me except myself. It is I who am sick. Let me just spend one night with you here, then I'll go away quietly and everything will be all right. You needn't call a doctor, you needn't give me a warm drink, you needn't even talk to me if you don't want to. Just let me stay here. I'm not asking for much.'

He drank a little tea, but refused Doino's offer of his bed. He was soon asleep.

Doino switched off the overhead light, placed a newspaper on top of the bedside lamp, and went to bed. He intended simply to thumb through Isaiah, but he soon found himself as enthralled as he had been when a child, and he carefully read chapter after chapter. More clearly, now, he recognised the prophet's anguish behind his threats; now he could feel how much Isaiah was enraptured by his own prophecies, by his picture of a near future which would be fulfilment and nothing else. That age was almost at hand, the time of waiting would not be great. Already the heir to the throne was growing up, the good king, the Messiah, taught in the true spirit, bounden to himself alone. Yes and then . . . then the prophet was placed inside a cedar tree split lengthwise, and prophet and tree were together sawn in half. Who remembered his death? While the hopes which he had kindled still consoled the faithful of this world. Thousands of years ago he had sown, and the seed had not sprung up, but yet they awaited its harvest. And, while waiting, men hoped.

From time to time Doino glanced at the sleeping man, the police boss of the betrayed movement which clung to its title of revolutionary. Karel had broken with his family, had given up everything, all

because of his love for the Party, which had promised that a fresh life would soon begin, a life 'based on new and noble men, freedom, education and happiness for all'. And he had become an agent, a deliverer of accused men who confessed to crimes that others had committed or that had never been committed at all, an accomplice in murder whose finest comrades were now rotting underground. There he lay in his sleeping-bag. He had, as he said, vomited his soul out of his body. And so lonely was he that he only felt safe under the roof of this heretic, a man, who for technical reasons alone, he had not handed over to the executioners.

The moon had not yet set when Doino was awakened by Karel's groans.

'What's the matter, Karel?'

'Nothing. I'm asleep.'

'I'll take your temperature. You're probably feverish.'

'Leave me alone, Doino. It's not fever.'

He was scarcely asleep before the groaning began again. Then it changed, becoming almost a howl. The ghastly sound came from him, forced out involuntarily as from some animal fleeing for its life that yet stops again and again to exhale its frightful terror and anguish.

Doino woke him up and made him swallow a little rum. At first Karel refused it, but then he drank greedily.

'I've been a bloody fool. I should have got drunk as soon as I heard about it. I'd have saved myself a lot of wretchedness. Give me the bottle!'

He was becoming himself once again.

'Don't imagine I think your rum's particularly good. I happen to know it's the cheapest you can buy here. You desert to the ruling class, and as a result you live in this squalid room and drink sip by sip the cheapest rot-gut in town. Whether I'm drunk or not is quite irrelevant, truth is relevant, as Andrei used to say. The truth is that I warned you. Warn – that's one word I shouldn't have spoken now. Damn it, it's made me sober again. Give me something more to drink.'

Doino had nothing more. He leaned down towards Karel and asked, with insistence in his voice:

'Who must be warned?'

Karel repeated Doino's question several times, as if attempting to grasp its meaning. Then he said:

'Nobody! Everyone was warned – a long, long time ago. Now let me sleep because I, I've got something important to do, got to look after the health of a very important comrade, name of Karel, and that's

all. You, you're a traitor, not dangerous now, could become dangerous one day. You're a traitor all right, still maybe you can understand all the same about Comrade Karel and how he's got to get some sleep.'

And he turned his face to the wall.

Doino sat down on the sleeping-bag. He took hold of Karel's head with his left hand, gripping the back of his neck. With his right he hit him first on one side of his face, then on the other. He did this over and over again, asking, with each blow:

'Who . . . must . . . be . . . warned?'

Karel stared at him in amazement. Then at last he shook his head loose from Doino's grip, crawled out of his sleeping-bag, and walked over to the wash basin. He turned on both taps and plunged his head under water.

They did not begin to talk until they had finished their coffee, nor did they look one another in the face. Doino was less upset by his having struck Karel than amazed. Could his anger at the great betrayal have been expressed in any more fatuous and ineffective manner? As a boy he had never been a scrapper, but he had also never avoided a fight. Had he ever hit a school friend in order to make him tell the truth? He could recall no such incident, yet it was not improbable. He, who fought against violence of all sorts, was, as he now suddenly realised, very close to violence himself.

'What's the matter with you?' Karel asked. 'Why do you bother about our filth, since you're not responsible any more? And why do you hit a sick, half-drunk man, who's saved your life and liberty more than once in days gone by, without so much as a by your leave? You really insist on knowing who it is who should be warned? You'd put it better if you asked who hasn't been warned. I don't know what it was like in the old days, but nowadays warning is a waste of time. Not that people have become more courageous; on the contrary, they're cowards, they're too frightened even to want to understand a warning.'

'Your friend Petar wasn't warned. He trusted you. But you pushed him in the water and he drowned. That's what we're talking about. Who is Petar today?'

'You, maybe. Why not?'

'You're lying.'

'Lying, am I? All right. Let's say it's some Super-Karel, what's it got to do with you? Why do you want to get mixed up in these dangerous things?'

Doino did not reply. He knew now that Karel would talk, that it was simply in order to talk that he had come here.

'You must get me a doctor's certificate stating that I've had a bad go of food-poisoning, and that I've been in bed continuously from day before yesterday until day after tomorrow. He must put in something about my having a bad liver too. You see I'm not taking any part in it. Petar will die, but the guilt won't be on me. I too will die a martyr's death, I too will be a hero, but nobody will ever know it. You didn't hit me hard, but all the same your blows did my stomach good. Make me some more coffee and give me a bit of bread.'

When he had eaten he began to talk in his customary, roundabout fashion. He seemed to be continually and deliberately avoiding the main issue, yet by the time he had finished it was all clear enough.

A few weeks ago a man who bore many names – Karel called him Ottokar Wolfan – had written a letter to the appropriate office in Moscow in which he announced his immediate and final break with Russia and the Party. As a result of the latest Moscow trial he had lost the final remnants of his faith and trust in the leaders. Now this man was not just anyone, he was not some minor Quixote, labour leader, or intellectual, who could be dismissed with a few sneers and forgotten. Wolfan was one of the few chiefs of the whole apparatus who lived outside Russia. In the police forces of all countries there were men who obeyed his orders, though most of them did not even know of his existence. They had been caught in nets of his devising and of which he alone knew the full extent. A man under his protection would escape safely from burning houses, from Buchenwald or the Lipari Islands. The man whom he 'condemned' was lost as surely as if the earth had opened to swallow him. That might sound exaggerated and fantastic, but the story was really very simple. The man was a genius at organisation with vast sums of money at his disposal, for he controlled many small and medium-sized banks all over the world, important export companies, shipping lines, and much else as well. In Paris and Shanghai, in Johannesburg and Toronto, Warsaw and New York, many innocuous people worked on his behalf. They dealt, bought, sold, kept their accounts in order and, if they worked hard enough, at Christmas they might receive a bonus. In brief, Wolfan was one of the greatest international capitalists in trade and transport. His firms brought him, or rather the apparatus he controlled, money and, more important than money, security against suspicion and persecution. In 1922 this man had disappeared from superficial politics and had become an apparently harmless person living on his income and suffering, it was said, from indifferent health. For sixteen years he had held all the threads in his hand, and now he had sat down and written his letter. In it he said that

he resigned, that he was prepared to hand over everything in good order, that he had no wish to keep anything for himself, that he was prepared for utter poverty, but that he could no longer live at odds with his conscience. What did he imagine? That they would believe him? Karel believed him, but the Russians were congenitally incapable of thinking such a thing even possible.

So Wolfan was lost. For the moment he still breathed, opened and closed his eyes as do living people, and if he laid his hand on his heart he could doubtless feel it beating, but he was dead.

'Compared to him, Egyptian mummies are hale and hearty,' said Karel in conclusion.

'And why did you begin to vomit exactly three days ago? Are you afraid for your own life?'

'That I am at all times. But that's nothing to do with it.'

'Is it on account of him, then? I can't believe that.'

'Why not? We're old friends and without his intervention they'd have eliminated me in Moscow.'

'The truth, Karel!'

'They asked me to take charge of the action. I was to go to him, as a friend, to arrange for the handing over of the records, and then fix the rest. Naturally I said I would and then . . . then I became sick. They are looking for me everywhere at this moment. But they won't think to look for me here. At least not right away.'

'Wolfan must be told by letter, or telegram.'

'Good God, don't you think he knows already, better than you or I do? Do you imagine he's got any illusions left? Anyhow, what's it got to do with you?'

It was broad daylight by now. Behind the branches of the tree people were beginning to move about in the houses. A woman was hanging out laundry; she stopped to slap the wrist of a little girl who was fiddling with the damp clothes; then she went back to work, pegging her washing to the line.

'You haven't answered me, Doino. You realise that the Wolfan affair is no concern of yours.'

'A cunning fellow has only a couple of tricks at his disposal, always the same ones which no doubt he perfects with time, but he's incapable of inventing any new. Because he can't learn. You came here in the hopes that everything would happen exactly as it has. You want me to take a message to this Ottokar Wolfan which might save his life. But everything should happen in such a way as though it were entirely my own idea. And as for me, I'm prepared to play your game, if for no

other reason than because I can see through it. Because, you see, this man means nothing to me, but murder – any murder that I can prevent – means a great deal. In the same way that that wretched, embittered woman enters into my life when I see her strike her little girl.’

‘So you think I’d like it if you went to see Ottokar? All right, but you’d better hurry. You’ve already missed the early train. The 14.15 is no use to you, since you wouldn’t arrive till midnight. So you’d better catch the 19.58; it gets in at 6.22 tomorrow morning, which means you can be at his place by half-past seven. You’ll need a passport with which you can cross the frontier without a visa. See, I have one here for you. It’s near enough as to description, and your photograph’s already inside. A little while back you had some visitors here – when you were out of course – they wanted to check on who you were corresponding with, what you were reading and writing and so on, and they took a couple of your photographs away with them. So much for that. Now listen carefully while I explain to you . . .’

Doino went to see Stetten in order to borrow the money for his journey and to give him a few facts, so that the professor would be in a position to intervene should anything untoward occur.

For the first time since Vienna the old man spoke once again of his grand-daughter.

‘You can have no idea, since you have never experienced anything similar. Love for a tiny child is an unspeakably painful joy. It is a hopeless love. But if I had known that it was all to end like this! She may have forgotten me already, at best I am a rapidly fading memory: an old man with whom she used to drive in a car. All she can clearly visualise is doubtless the chauffeur’s peaked cap. Everything I’ve done has been a failure!’

‘Not everything,’ said Doino, though without conviction, for he knew what the professor meant.

I went through every sort of anxiety and fear on her account. And now, if something were to happen to her, I should not even hear of it. I must live as though she were dead. Can you understand that? Sometimes it is almost as though I wished she were. And that idea upsets me profoundly, profoundly. What do you think?’

But Doino was thinking of Wolfan and of the hard task that lay ahead of him. He said nothing. Stetten went on:

‘All right, we won’t talk about it any more. I have good news: the books are here. We have to pay the duty before we can collect them. They’ll be shut now, but we can do it immediately after luncheon.’

Doino told him of his proposed journey and Stetten advised him not to go.

'It's both dangerous and pointless. Why risk your life? Is it not perhaps because you have been inactive for such a long time?'

'That may have something to do with it,' replied Doino. He did not wish to discuss the matter any further, for time was pressing, and he said good-bye. He would be back within forty-eight hours at the most and then they would settle down to work together. There would be no more postponements.

The seven travelling companions in Doino's compartment soon got into conversation, exchanging reminiscences of last year's summer holiday, giving one another the names of pensions in which, let's face it, you're not comfortable but the food's delicious. Inexhaustible as this subject might appear, after two hours not one of them had a single further piece of information to impart. Their curiosity was now satisfied, each knew all about the other six, who each one was, how he earned his daily bread and how he spent his leisure hours. The light was switched off and even the ladies – two matrons and one spinster – were soon asleep, though they had all three declared that travelling by train invariably kept them awake.

Doino had become reconciled to the fact that women also snore, as he had become reconciled to much else. Such reconciliations had doubtless been of a placid nature, since he could not remember the point at which any of these facts had ceased consciously to trouble him. He even accepted with resignation the hateful symptoms of age in his own body: the little yellow spots on the back of his hands and on his face, the wrinkles beneath his eyes. He had grown tolerant of everything, everything human was bearable save only men's false or half-true ideas. *Mundus vult decepti*, the Romans had noticed with a smile. Perhaps now, even more than in Roman times, the world longed to be swindled. Doino himself thoroughly enjoyed listening to the hucksters in the market, cleverly lauding their inferior merchandise. Since early youth he had taken pleasure in watching a conjuror or reading about the cunning exploits of tricksters and confidence men, for he was aware how difficult it is to invent something really new. Why then did he suffer as from a sickness each time he came across the common lie?

'I'm placing all my trust in old age. Eventually it must begin in earnest, eventually the time must come when I've had all the little girls I shall ever want. Then I shan't even notice them when they pass me by

in their provocative, delicious way. God, what a day that will be! From that moment I shall really begin to lead a free life.'

So had an old man once spoken to him, a great artist, whose unfortunate passions had led him through a long series of blackmails, trials, and newspaper sensationalism. During the last few years Doino had often thought of that man. He too had begun to hope that old age and disappointment might gradually free him from his passions as from a vice, that he might eventually, in equanimity, come to bear the age in which he lived. What was he doing in this crowded train, tired and yet unable to sleep? What had the falsifications of Christian history to do with him? What was he looking for among men defeated in the distant past, and why was he compelled to take their side, to share in their just but useless revolts? And another thing: Paul of Samosata was obviously a corrupt opportunist, the prototype of those princes of the Church who were later to show such a profound taste for power and so few scruples as to the means by which they obtained it.

Doino made no attempt to sleep, for he knew that he would not succeed.

The house was situated some two hundred yards from the main road. It was in no way different from the other villas of the area, for they were all solidly built as though intended to last for many years. The walls of this one were grey with green woodwork. It was entirely surrounded by a tall steel fence. The lawns were divided by sandy tracks, and a wider road led to the garage, which was located behind the house.

Doino had to ring several times before the gate in the fence swung open. He walked slowly towards the villa and then stopped before a massive oak door.

'Stand exactly in the middle.'

It was a man's voice, from somewhere close beside him, and it sounded tired. Doino did as he was told.

'Who are you?' the voice asked.

Doino repeated the exact phrase which Karel had taught him. Then he gave his name, all his pseudonyms, and finally his present address. The voice asked:

'What have you got in your left-hand overcoat pocket? Empty all your pockets on to the doorstep.'

Doino took a French loaf from his right pocket, a Bible from his left. He placed them, together with his raincoat, on the top step. He then emptied his jacket and trouser pockets, which he turned inside out. The

door opened and he found himself standing before another door which slowly swung back while the first one closed. He raised his arms above his head. The man ran his hands over him to make sure he had no concealed weapon before putting his own revolver away.

He was now in a wide hall that seemed to run the whole length of the house. Doors led off it into various rooms, and there was also a staircase. It was bathed in a strong, even, white light that came from the ceiling.

'I'm afraid I must have awakened you,' said Doino. Wolfan was wearing a raincoat over grey-and-red striped pyjamas.

'Sit down, Faber. You didn't wake me up. I haven't slept for days. I doze off but I wake up again as soon as anyone comes along the road in front of the house or the path behind it.'

He gestured towards the two doors at either end of the hall. Doino now noticed that an unusually large looking-glass was built in above each door. He understood how Wolfan had been able to observe him while he emptied his pockets.

'I also have a listening apparatus with microphones installed in a wide circle all around the house. You see I'm protected against being taken by surprise. Don't imagine that I've had all this installed during the past six days. It was done years ago. At that time, of course, I had quite other dangers in mind.'

'Ingenious,' said Doina admiringly.

'Quite. But it won't be any use. They won't let me go on living. It's a matter of hours, days at most. I assume Karel sent you with some plan. Tell me about it all the same.'

Doino explained in detail Karel's plan. It involved getting Wolfan, within thirty hours, on board a cargo ship. This ship would not touch at a continental port for forty days, during which time Wolfan would therefore be free from danger. He would finally disembark in South America, where he would disappear and start an absolutely new life. His pursuers would thus lose track of him for a long time. The ship's captain had been told to expect a passenger whom he would describe to his crew as a journalist; needless to say, he had no idea that this was Wolfan. These preparations for flight had been made by Karel for his own use in a moment of panic; he was now ready to let his friend profit by them instead of he. The most difficult part would be to get him out of this house and this area, but Karel had also some suggestions to make on that score.

While Doino was explaining Karel's plan at considerable length, Wolfan sat motionless in his armchair, his chin sunk on his breast. He

seemed to be half asleep. Only when he heard a noise did he look up and examine carefully one or other of the mirrors which he adjusted by means of a mechanism within reach of his hand. His long face was entirely unremarkable, even uninteresting, neither ugly nor handsome, neither clever nor stupid. No feature was outstanding or striking. Perhaps his eyes were more memorable than the rest, watery grey eyes behind white-rimmed glasses. It would have been hard to guess his age, which might have been anything between twenty-eight and forty. Externally he gave the impression of being an utterly average man. He should be able to pass anywhere unnoticed, thought Doino as he looked at him. He hardly had the appearance of an organiser of genius, of one who for many years had exercised powers of life or death over hundreds of human beings. He did not even look like a man who had been very rich for a long time.

'It doesn't sound too bad a plan, though there are one or two weak points. But those can always be worked out. No, its real weakness is . . . Do you know what its real weakness is, Faber?'

'No, I don't know much about this sort of thing. I . . .'

'I can see you've never been a member of the apparatus,' interrupted Wolfan. 'Its real weakness is that Karel knows about it, that it's Karel's idea.'

'But he wants to save you! That's why I'm here.'

'You want to save me, I know that, though I don't as yet understand why. As for Karel, well let's be fair, let's admit that he wanted to save me day before yesterday or early yesterday morning. By yesterday afternoon he may have changed his mind. And the very fact that he knows the whole plan so thoroughly means that he would be in a position to destroy me when and where he wanted.'

The man had a curious gesture by which he underlined a word: he would fold his hands as though praying. Only now did Doino notice that his ash-blond hair did not cover his whole skull; he had a bald patch like a tonsure.

'Why would he wish to destroy you?'

'In the first place, because he is my friend and because he has more to thank me for than any other person. So how can he better prove his loyalty to the Party than by destroying me? He must do it. Secondly . . .'

'You're crazy!'

'What do you mean, Faber? Didn't you yourself, for years on end, loudly defend resolutions which you began by condemning in the most violent terms? And didn't you do that simply in order to prove your loyalty to the Party? Am I not right?'

'But what you're talking about would be the foulest crime.'

'When a man of your intelligence produces naïf arguments or tautologies, it simply means that he's sheltering behind a lie. Am I not right? Good. Since yesterday afternoon the people who are watching me have disappeared. No more cars with flat tyres seventy yards from my front door, no more bicyclists picnicking at the back, no more delivery vans whose drivers have mistaken the address, no thoughtful hikers, no land-surveyors with their theodolites. Gone, all gone, as if by magic. Therefore yesterday, at about three o'clock, it was decided to adopt another course of action.'

'If that's so, then . . .'

'Which doesn't mean that your visit is not a help. For four days I haven't spoken to a living soul. I was thinking of starting to write again. I was a poet once. Melchior picked my name for me: G. J. Riton.'

'But Riton is dead, drowned years ago in the North Sea. Melchior wrote an elegy on his death: *Green as your eyes in the tides of the sea . . .'*

'I put out the story of Riton's death when I finally lost all hope of returning to my earlier way of living. I wanted no more letters from him, because they were both painful and seductive. It was better to make a complete break – cruel and final. The hero's unexpected death is not only the novelist's solution to all problems. Am I not right? When I had sent my letter to Moscow and had dismissed all my colleagues I tried in complete solitude to resurrect G. J. Riton. I failed, totally. *Now have I lost my own self. . . .* Not now, a long time ago. They will kill nothing but a living corpse.'

They both glanced towards the left-hand mirror, for they could hear footsteps approaching along the road. A young couple entered their field of vision. Both man and girl were carrying heavy rucksacks and were identically dressed in blue shirts, shorts and sandals. They were holding hands as they walked. They stopped immediately in front of the gate and the girl leaned down to adjust the strap of her left sandal. Their voices were as plainly audible as if they had been in the hall of the villa. He said:

'Of course I told her right away she was quite wrong about you. I told her if she knew you better . . .'

She interrupted him:

'You needn't have bothered. I don't see why it should make any difference to you what she thinks about me.'

They walked on.

For those two outside the sun was shining, all roads were open to them, the woods and the dells awaited them. They were filled with confidence and they did not even need to know this. Doino felt as

though he had been sitting for an immeasurably long time, a prisoner in this house, a man forgotten by all the forgotten world. Yet all he had to do was to get up and walk away. Melchior had not been mistaken, even though he had been deceived. Riton was dead long ago and his green eyes were rolled by the sea-tides. But Ottokar Wolfan's character was obscure. He had shouldered a burden of guilt in order to serve a great cause. Too late he had turned away from the machine of his own invention, and its wheels were now crushing him.

'So it seems that my journey is unfortunately a waste of time,' Doino began.

He intended to add two or three more sentences and then leave. Wolfan did not appear to have heard his words, for he said:

'For years on end I have been considering this step, weighing the pros and cons. During the last few months I have been so preoccupied with the matter that hardly for a moment has it not been uppermost in my mind. And all that time I have had one certitude – that as soon as I broke away I would be filled with such a sensation of freedom as would make up for everything else, even the fear of death. But that sensation of freedom I have not felt. How was it with you? You broke away a year ago, so you have already passed through all the phases – did you ever experience a feeling of liberty? Do you have it now?'

Wolfan had leaned forward and his face seemed separated from both neck and trunk, like a death-mask. Doino avoided Wolfan's eyes as he said, softly:

'It was unutterable sadness and a desire to stop living.'

'So that's it. That deliverance from such a slavery should start with such a deception!'

He spoke as though to himself, sank back into his armchair and the lower part of his face was hidden by the collar of his raincoat.

My poems will be deeds, not words alone. . . . Thus had he written when G. J. Riton was still a young man. And now Wolfan found it a deception that he could not free himself from past action.

'I shall go now,' said Doino, rising to his feet.

'Why? You must have something to eat first. You'll find plenty of good food in the larder. While you're getting yourself something I shall dress. Keep an eye on the mirrors from time to time. Here, read these two papers. It's my letter. The newspapers only printed extracts.'

When he returned he seemed another man. He looked almost handsome in a well-cut grey suit, and his gestures were redolent of self-confidence. His hair, carefully brushed back, completely concealed his tonsure.

'Wolfan, your letter is well written and clear, your accusations to the point, and your conclusions unimpeachable. But you're by nature too much of an optimist.'

'Optimist?'

Wolfan burst out laughing. His laughter was almost boyish.

'Yes. For instance, when you say, "You cannot go on deceiving the world. The international proletariat will judge your misdeeds and you will pay for your crimes. The world has a good memory." No, my dear Wolfan, I should not care to rely on the world's memory. If we are beaten, then in one hundred years' time Stalin will no longer be the son of a Georgian shoemaker, but the Son of God. In new churches his name will be uttered with timorous awe, and the devout will pray for his intercession. In the schools the children will be taught that we wished to take his life, and that his only shield and protection were his divine innocence. Thus he need not even be put to death in order to liberate mankind.'

'Faber, you eat too little and read the Bible too much. I see that now.'

'You see nothing at all. Sit down again and I'll explain to you how a monotheistic religion of redemption, as practised by a few poor devils, became a Church. I don't imagine that it will cheer you up a great deal, but at least it will show you how, almost invariably, the game is bigger than the player.'

Wolfan was only half listening. He was fully aware of the extraordinary situation: here was a man, come to save him, who instead was treating him to a lengthy disquisition on obscure events and relationships which might have been topical two thousand years ago. Every hour counted, yet Faber seemed to have forgotten the purpose of his journey. From such men as him the future Son-of-God from Georgia need have no fear. Wolfan was still undecided as to whether or not he should agree to the plan prepared by Karel; but he was becoming increasingly interested in what Doyno was saying. The latter's excitement – he had jumped to his feet and was striding up and down the hall – was infectious. There could be no doubt that parallels did in fact exist. Viewed thus in connection with the present the distant past offered a serious warning. But then if that were the case . . .

'And that's how paganism was victorious once again, all along the line. The thousands of local gods were happily resurrected, the churches were filled with idols, the faithful ate the body of God and drank His blood – just like the most barbarous of the heathens. They were ignorant of the Bible; they lived in the shadow of the devil; they trembled at the prospect of hell; and they sought consolation from

ikons of the Virgin Mary. Christ the Paraclete, the Comforter, had been killed not for a few days only, but for fifteen hundred years.'

'Perhaps . . . I wonder if . . . perhaps I ought not to have broken with the Party after all,' said Wolfan thoughtfully. 'If what you tell me is correct, I've been very foolish. I don't know. . . . All at once I just don't know.'

And then, with sudden loudness, he added:

'My God! Why are you telling me all this?'

'Wait. I've just given you a brief summary of facts that are in general well known. The other side of the story is also well worth examining. When Paul was summoned to Jerusalem to justify himself before the Christian community there . . .

Doino stopped talking and followed the direction of Wolfan's gaze. He was looking at one of the mirrors. A woman was standing in the road, near the gate. She turned away, hesitated, took two steps backwards, and then stopped again. She opened her handbag and looked in it; doubtless she was examining her face in a pocket mirror. She fumbled among the small objects in her bag and took out a lipstick, or perhaps it was a powder-puff, with which she busied herself for a moment or two. Then she closed her bag and turned resolutely towards the gate. They could see her clearly now. She was of medium height, rather heavily built, with blonde hair; she wore a white blouse, a grey suit and grey shoes. She glanced up at the closed shutters and then looked around the garden as though to see if anyone were hidden there. She laid her finger on the bell but did not immediately press the button. She was waiting for something. What?

Wolfan had suddenly jumped to his feet. Now he sat down again on the edge of his chair, but he did not take his eyes from the reflection in the mirror. Doino said, forcibly:

'Karel told me to warn you against the woman. He said you would know what he meant.'

Wolfan nodded and adjusted the mirror. The woman had rung the bell and was now walking towards the front door. The reflection of her face was almost too clear; it seemed larger than lifesize, serious, severe. But suddenly, as though obeying an order, her expression changed and she smiled with half-open lips. She was no longer young and had probably never been beautiful – one of those women who become seductresses because they cannot bear to wait until some man finally decides to seduce them. Such women are successful.

Wolfan made him a sign. Doino picked up the little machine and spoke into the mouthpiece:

'What do you want?'

'Who's that?' she replied. Her tone of voice was violent, as though this were a quarrel that had been going on for a long time.

'What do you want? Who are you?'

'Who are *you*? Where are you talking from? I won't talk to someone I can't see.'

Doino did not answer. She took a few steps backward, glanced up at the shutters, and then came up to the front door again. She shouted:

'Tell your master Margarete is here and wishes to see him.'

'The master is away. He won't be back for another week.'

'You're lying! Will you or will you not tell me who you are?'

Doino turned the switch. Now they could talk without the woman overhearing them. But Wolfan seemed far away, and the blood had all drained out of his face – like a man caught in such an intensity of waiting that the present becomes entirely remote, even though he does not know what he awaits and whatever it may be is far, far away.

The woman shouted, begged, threatened; she even tried to charm the unseen watcher into letting her enter. On June afternoons in high mountain valleys summer seems, almost momentarily, to alternate with the fresh breath of autumn, when a swift-moving cloud covers the sun, darkening the pastures, before it quickly passes on and the slopes are green again in the sunshine; even so did the expressions change on this woman's face, from a bitter fury, to a gratitude that promised everything, to a resigned tenderness.

Wolfan was reaching for the machine. Doino snatched it from him. Wolfan said, in the voice of one who surrenders:

'It's enough! I can't leave her standing outside the door any longer.'

'You're mad! She'll calm down presently and go away.'

'Leave me alone, Faber. You can't understand. You don't know.'

He turned the switch. The mouthpiece trembled in his hand. When he had regained control of his nerves he said:

'All right, Margit, I'm here.'

'Thank God, Georg. Don't keep me waiting any longer. I'm at the end of my tether, Georg, do you understand? At the end of my tether.'

She raised her head and the mirror showed a triple reflection of her face, the centre one flattened, as it were, the other two lengthened and compressed.

'I'll open the door right away.' His features had suddenly relaxed and had assumed an expression of weariness, as of sensuality sinking into disgust and self-contempt.

He was reaching for the button that opened the door when Doino

took him by the sleeve and pointed at the mirror. The woman was holding some glittering object in her hand. Quickly, as though afraid of being seen, she struck the heel of her left shoe. The heel came off and fell down to the lower step. She picked it up, seemed about to throw it away, but instead held it in her left hand. With her right she pushed back her beret and patted her curls. Then she smiled.

When the inside door had closed again Wolfan walked towards the woman. He moved slowly, bent forward as if afraid of stumbling. She took a step towards him, stopped, said his name twice, and ran to him. He held out his hand but she did not take it. She threw her arms around her neck; his were hanging at his side, and his eyes were shut. She said: 'Georg, my poor darling!'

Wolfan's head dropped on to the woman's shoulder. He was sobbing silently. She raised her hand and ran her fingers through his hair.

'Forgive me, Georg! I left you alone too long. All alone.'

'I should have woken you earlier, Faber, but you were sleeping so soundly.'

Slowly Doino opened his eyes.

'And now, Faber, you can tell me that I'm the most utter fool.'

'What's the time?'

'You've plenty of time before your train leaves. Margit is making some coffee. Have a cup with us. And if you're still tired, spend the night here. There are plenty of spare rooms.'

Doino got to his feet, put on his jacket, and picked up his overcoat which he had been using as a pillow. He then walked towards the door.

'You don't understand, Faber. Listen! I was Margit's first man and she was the first woman in my life. That's important. Am I not right? They sent her here to lure me into a trap. At first she refused to do it, finally she had to give in. She's told me all about it herself, because since being with me again, during these last few hours, she's realised she can't hand me over to be murdered. But listen, Faber, if I knew for a fact that that woman planned to liquidate me, do you know what I'd do? Nothing! Because her action would be a judgment on me, a judgment so awful that I would not wish to escape it. Do you understand? Do you?'

'Work these useless gadgets of yours. I want to get out of here.'

'Don't go just yet. Stay a little longer. I want to thank you. Besides, you're short of money. You've had expenses on my account, and I'd like at least to reimburse you.'

At the door Doino turned and looked at him for the last time. Here

was a man who had been an organiser of genius, a brilliant policeman, the head of a labyrinthine secret service. So many men had sacrificed their freedom and risked their lives in order to carry out his orders. And there he stood, a dead man: his elimination had been ordered.

'We'll meet again in any case,' said Wolfan. 'We'll work together. Because thanks to Margit I'm as good as out of danger.'

Doino nodded and walked out. He felt that he was re-entering a well-arranged and tidy world. The white road, the path running along the forest's edge, the fields on the other side and, at the far distant horizon, the glittering, silver-white mountain peaks. This was not the 'outside', this was a world that welcomed him in: Creation might well be satisfied with itself. For here the possible and the real were one. Here movement began and finished in perfect circles. There was no end and no object. Creation, being devoid of ambition, never failed and was never disillusioned.

It was a fine day, warm without being too hot, and the light was not so bright as to hurt one's eyes. Yes, this would be the way to live. . . . Yet as he walked on Doino realised that the illusion could not last. Soon, he knew, he would again be conscious of the vanity of all his actions. All doing became gestures of futility, movements in a void. As in dreams of childhood, it was a race away from death, a race in which one's legs refused to move; one shouted and no sound came from one's lips; after indescribable efforts nothing was achieved. The world was split in two: causes everywhere, effects nowhere.

Mara had set out to destroy Slavko, and after it was over it was nothing but a ridiculous episode, a joke that failed. He had taken a train to save a man from assassination, to bring him back from the shadow of death; and it had been the dumb talking to the deaf. For months now Edi and his comrades had been asking for labour permits, without success. They were consuming their pathetic capital, discussing the models of toys, arguing about their restatement of the sociological theme, wondering whether they should not give up the whole idea and rent a large farm instead.

None of them thought seriously of ending his life; despair remained simply the impatience of hope.

Doino had given up waiting for the last dregs of hope to dry up. No god could deliver him. He was condemned to hope.

'I was right, Dion,' said Stetten. 'You could have spared yourself the trip.'

Djoura too examined the newspaper. The two photographs, the

diagram and the report of the assassination occupied in all a good half of the front page. There were fuller details on page three. One of the pictures was of Wolfan at the age of nineteen: a handsome, open face beneath a straw boater. In his hands, folded upon his chest, he held a single flower. Next to this was the photograph of the corpse; eyes dilated as by a boundless astonishment, brows drawn up, mouth atrociously mutilated, lips split in three places. On the diagram the spot was marked where the car had stopped, and also the place where the victim, standing near the radiator, had been shot from a distance of five or six yards: in the words of the newspaper he had been 'perforated like a sieve - the target for some sixteen bullets'. The place where the two killers had hidden was also shown. A dotted line led there from the car, indicating the route covered by the woman when running from the automobile to her accomplices before they opened fire. The only witness, accidentally present, had noticed that the woman limped; on the other hand he had proved unable to describe her clothes. He couldn't even say for sure whether or not she had been wearing a coat.

Djoura quoted:

"The blood from his chest was a scarlet flower . . ." Somebody must have already written that, and I forgive him - all the more since I'd never express it that way myself. Yet there's an obvious temptation to draw a comparison between the two photographs. The flower on the chest, held at the exact spot which, thanks to a living woman, was turned into a sieve - it's what you might call food for thought. On the other hand, any such ready-made comparisons, gratuitously offered, ought to be avoided on principle. If I may generalise, I should say that symbols should be treated with distrust, as should women who lose a heel in order to draw clever men from their hiding-places: off to the cobbler, off to death!

'It's too stupid to be even comprehensible,' remarked Stetten impatiently.

'No more stupid than the story of Samson and Delilah or of Holofernes and Judith,' replied Djoura. 'Anecdotes that might appeal to the writers of opera librettos or to the painters of historical canvases, but not to anyone else. For the last five thousand years we writers have had the grand total of five plots to work with, always the same, and . . .'

'Five?' Stetten asked ironically. 'That is a considerable over-estimate, my friend.'

'Perhaps. Let's say three, then. Two tragic and one comic.'

'For the moment you seem to find the comic one more attractive

than the others. This infamous murder doesn't seem to disgust you. The misuse of love as a means to encompass a vile slaughter – the principal plot of our age – doesn't appear to interest you particularly.'

Doino interrupted the professor.

'Perhaps the woman did love him. She may have loved him during their last three days together. Perhaps even in the car, sitting beside him, she still hoped that a miracle would happen, that she would not in fact say to Wolfan: "Stop a minute, I don't feel well." But she did not grant herself a miracle.'

'All right,' said Djoura. 'Desdemona snatches Othello's dagger and kills him, Romeo dies while Juliet lives. So what's to be done with these heroic widows? Marry them off? Why not? But in that case the plot assumes comic aspects, which I hasten to add are by no means negligible. For example, it could all be transposed as follows . . .'

Stetten listened with growing interest. Djoura was the story-teller, the man who for countless generations has wandered through Slav villages. The city of his origin was Byzantium, not Rome. He had an enormous bald skull, a wide mouth, almost grotesquely mobile, the great magic eyes of a Byzantine Madonna in a highly sensual face: he could equally well be a saint or an impenitent sinner.

And opposite him sat Doino, son of a race that for millenia now had dwelt in cities. For him the three plots, two tragic and one comic, had long become one. All struggle was a return to the struggle with the angel; perhaps the angel would come back, perhaps he might be conquered. For to be defeated, even by him, remained intolerable.

'These two men,' thought Stetten, 'so different and yet so fond of one another, together they should prove invincible. But they have already been beaten, they are more lost than a drop of rain beneath the hot sun of summer.'

Doino left. He looked for Karel, but in vain. By chance he happened to find traces of the woman. She was hiding in Paris. This time his pity for her was greater than his contempt. These Margits, Leopolds, Hildes, even Wolfans – they were simultaneously both accomplices and victims. Like the epoch they symbolised they were at once despicable, dangerous and pathetic.

CHAPTER III

I'VE come to fetch you, Doino. How do I look this evening?' 'Prettier than ever, Relly. You look like a woman determined to win back a man who is so bewitched by some sweet little seventeen-year-old that he's entirely forgotten the past.'

'You should have been a novelist.'

'No, Relly. It would bore me to describe in detail how a girl seduces a man. Your fellow-writer, Djoura, maintains that for the past few thousand years story-tellers have had only three plots at their disposal. All you people have been able to do has been first to condense and then to expand them. Penelope was a model wife, I daresay, but doubtless very boring and finally, I suspect, a positive pest. You writers are Penelopes.'

'I've decided not to be a model wife any longer. I'm going to introduce you to Gerald in a few minutes. He's the one I've picked and I hope you'll like him.'

She said this jokingly, but it was easy enough to see that she meant it seriously. With a sudden pang he thought: 'I've really no idea what her life is like. We never let her tell us about herself. Somewhere or other I've got the manuscript of her last book and I haven't even bothered to read a line of it. I treat her as badly as if she were still my girl. And that was twelve years ago, after all.'

'Sit down, Relly. No, not there, here. So you can see the tree instead of the wallpaper. Now then, tell me all about it.'

'Why do you love human beings so much less than trees? And usually you don't even know their names. Why does everything about a tree seem to you so . . . so wonderful, while . . .'

'That's not what you came here to talk about. You're unhappy. Why?'

'Aren't you ashamed to ask such a question? What you really want to know is why I should refuse to go on being unhappy. When I see a puzzled look come over Gerald's face I know what's worrying the boy; to which restaurant should he take me for dinner, did he go too far in holding my arm as we crossed the Boulevard du Montparnasse; should he ask me to come with him to his American friends' cocktail party; has he talked too much about himself; do I perhaps find him rather

dull; dare he tell me about the time a man nearly seduced him? Those are the sort of things he worries about, and it makes me happy just to be with a man like that. I've had all I can take of your people's problems, I hate them, they're useless, agonising and boring too. Do you understand me, Doino? With Paul back in the country again I've suddenly seen that there is absolutely no reason why I shouldn't go and jump in the Seine. Then Gerald appeared. It's thanks to him I realised once again that I'm a woman, that there are other things in this world besides Hitler and Stalin and the *préfecture* and *permis de séjour* and labour permits, besides your "larger perspectives" and "taking the long view", and that most people really live proper, simple lives. So there's going to be a war? Very well then, for better or for worse there'll be a war. It hasn't begun yet, which means that this is still peacetime. Why don't you interrupt me? Don't let me go on talking. If you don't stop me I'll be so overwhelmed with self-pity that I'll burst into tears. Then my eyes will get all puffy and I'll have a red nose and I'll be sniffing all evening. So say your piece. I know it'll stop me wanting to talk about myself any more.'

'You love Edi. What's the point of fooling about with this Gerald?' He did not look at her as he asked this.

'He's still a good listener,' she thought, 'but he's already turning me into the raw material for some intellectual system: the destiny of refugees – the effect of emigration on women – three characteristic attitudes may be noted, and so on and so forth. Before I'd even finished crying he'd have already reached his conclusion: correctly observed, the personal problems of refugees, though oppressive and at times even agonising, are still essentially uninteresting.'

'Edi loves you,' Doino began again. 'And you love him. Nothing has changed there.'

'If I love him who is it that I love? At home I knew exactly. Now I can't be certain of anything. You wouldn't believe how incredibly he has changed.' She spoke with growing intensity. She described the man whom she used to love as though talking of one who was dead. She praised his gentleness and sensitivity, his boundless goodness, his wisdom when confronted with the weaknesses of others, his reliability – he had been a true refuge, a protection against everything, even oneself.

'And it was just because he was like that that he was able to exorcise me of you. But now he's as unbearable as you used to be. He's a ghost of flesh and blood, he presses on me like a great weight. I can't go on living this way. I really can't go on any longer. You must believe me.'

Between sobs she described her husband as he now was, so inex-

plicably changed from the man she had married: intolerant and impatient, as though fleeing from his own tenderness and that of his wife and child; even in the movements of love he betrayed the haste of that flight, the refusal to accept the present. That was the worst part: he was elsewhere, far away even when he was looking her in the eyes. He lived wrapped up in the darkness of his despair and of his hatred. She would willingly have died with him, since his suffering was so unspeakable; live with him she could not.

'No man may choose his century,' he said.

She looked at him then and she had to smile. Wiping away her tears she walked over to him.

'You're quite impossible, Doino, you're inhuman. Do you really think you can console a woman with such pompous phrases as that?'

'I wasn't even trying to do so. I just wanted to say that . . .'

'Well, don't. A few more comforting remarks of that sort and I'd really have to throw myself out of the window. I see you've put some water on to boil. Would you like me to make you a quick cup of coffee before we go out?'

'You underestimate my kindness. I heated the water so that you could bathe your eyes.'

'You knew right away that I was going to cry?'

'Yes. Albert Gräfe has been waiting for years now for the time to come when he could cry. In vain. You're a lucky person, Relly, only you don't realise it. Now pretty yourself up again, and if there's any hot water left over you can make me a cup of coffee after all.'

Relly laughed aloud.

'Really, Doino! Nobody could ever accuse you of having changed, that's absolutely certain. Perhaps one day I'll manage to stop loving you, but even on my deathbed I'll always be ready to make you one more cup of coffee.'

It was an unpretentious sort of place, just an ordinary *bistro* for ordinary people. In the last few years *bon viveurs* had grown tired of the big, famous restaurants. Ingenious persons therefore 'discovered' little places like this one which, for a few days or weeks, became the haunt of connoisseurs. Gourmets would praise the chef, alleging that he prepared this or that dish with 'consummate mastery'. Then a new *bistro* would be discovered, and the talents of the chef which had only so recently been lauded in such extravagant terms would soon be forgotten again.

It was in a place of this sort that they met Gerald. Relly had a sort of

stage fright which she could scarcely conceal. She was far too anxious that her English friend should make a good impression, and that Doino should not find the man of her choice ridiculous. Gerald began by saying little, and when he had to speak it was in monosyllables. He was afraid of being observed and judged; his reactions to this fear were those of an over-sensitive boy. He drank a great deal, and his rather long face soon became pink in consequence.

Doino, too, was quiet; he was impressed by the youth and beauty of the tall, blond young man who looked as though he might have stepped out of some English tailor's catalogue, nervous perhaps, but devoid of worry. It was enough for Doino just to see him in order to be made painfully conscious of his own ugliness, his skin that was so rapidly losing its lustre, the austerity of his features and the physical symptoms of premature age.

'They write me that the weather at home is wonderful, almost like the Mediterranean, bright sunshine and blue skies. Now is the time you ought to visit England,' said Gerald in a friendly voice.

Thus at last conversation began. The food was good if a little on the heavy side – this chef's speciality was *Cassoulet toulousain* – and if the wine was mediocre none of them noticed it. Gradually Relly ceased to be nervous and spoke naturally once again.

It transpired that Gerald knew a very great deal about the ancient world. He spoke of the Mycenæan civilisation, of religious rites as practised in Asia Minor, of the Greek myths. With quite remarkable modesty he mentioned his own plans for the future, which were not inconsiderable. Unfortunately there was a danger that he might be hindered in continuing his researches or even be compelled to give up his work altogether. He had an uncle who was thinking of retiring from politics. Should he do so Gerald, as his nephew, would be expected to take over his seat in the House, for his family had represented that particular constituency for generations. Another uncle was seriously ill and might soon die. In that case Gerald would inherit the title and would be expected to take his place in the House of Lords. These were responsibilities which unfortunately he had no choice but to accept, even though he knew that politics was a complete waste of time which furthermore made any serious work impossible.

Relly quickly changed the subject, since she was afraid the men might become involved in a political discussion. As the meal went on the spirits of all three of them improved. By the end Gerald was almost talkative and had regained his self-confidence. He suggested that they all go to a cabaret which was enjoying a fleeting popularity. Doino

excused himself on the grounds of having another engagement for which, he feared, he was already late. They said good-bye in most friendly fashion and he left.

Relly caught up with him in the street. He asked:

'Why don't you go on with Gerald? Incidentally he's a clever man.'

She did not reply and he accompanied her to her home on foot. It was a long walk. It seemed to him that she trembled from time to time, even though the evening was warm. When they reached her front door she said:

'Please come up. Please help me wait for Edi.'

The first room was kitchen and dining-room combined. The smaller room was the bedroom. The lamp cast only a weak light, so the poverty of the furniture was less in evidence than it would have been by day. Relly busied herself with the preparation of Edi's evening meal.

'For a long time,' she said, 'I haven't heard you sing. Why is that?'

'I just stopped, automatically I suppose. I hardly noticed I had.'

'Everything has stopped that way. And why did you propose leaving me alone with Gerald? You knew perfectly well . . .'

'What?'

She walked up to him as though she intended to snatch the evening paper from his hands. But she turned away and went into the other room. He heard her throw herself down upon the bed. At first she cried softly, but then her sobs grew louder, uncontrollable.

'What shall I do? Tell me what I should do, Doino?'

Her voice was muffled. He did not answer. Slowly she calmed down. He took two handkerchiefs from the chest of drawers and gave them to her. She dried her eyes and blew her nose.

'There's no telling what you'd have done if it hadn't been for me, Relly. I mean if I hadn't been here to give you a handkerchief.'

He smiled sadly and she was angry with him no longer. She got up and went back to work. She baked cakes which she sold in the patisseries as a Viennese speciality. The profit was small but it was still worth her while. Unfortunately any that were not sold, and which had thus become stale, she had to take back. When that happened they ate them at home, sometimes instead of bread.

She asked casually:

'So you liked Gerald?'

'Yes. He's young, good-looking, very well educated, a distinguished scholar. His wealth is a disadvantage, but one can become reconciled to that in certain circumstances. Still, what an unlucky fellow he is! To have every virtue and every advantage and then over and above all that

to get a woman like you – it's preposterous! If he had at least a club-foot!

'So you think that's why I didn't stay with him?'

'Of course. Even if it was originally merely a translator's error the fact is nevertheless true – a camel can't pass through a needle's eye. Do you know the difference between a refugee and a man like Gerald? A refugee is a man who has lost everything except his accent, while people like Gerald have never lost anything, not even their accent.'

'Are you trying to make me laugh, you fool? Nothing seems to me so utterly dismal as the jokes you people make about yourselves.'

'True enough. Misery has almost never produced a good style. A human being can learn anything except how to be continually unhappy. He's a metaphysical creature who likes eating cake, and that's the long and the short of it.'

'He doesn't like cake enough unfortunately. Otherwise we wouldn't have to eat stale *Pischingertorte* so often.'

Edi soon came back. He ate quickly and then accompanied Doino to the nearest metro station. On the way there they stopped at a café. Edi spoke of his troubles, of the absence of progress that he and his friends were making. Doino then mentioned Relly's state of mind, and how it had all become too much for her. She must get away to the country for a few weeks and be alone with her husband. It would do Edi good as well. They could borrow the necessary money from Stetten.

'It would be best if she left me,' said Edi sadly. 'She doesn't share our hopes and our illusions, and that's why she finds it all so unbearable.'

'She'll never leave you. She loves you.'

'Love? Never has that word sounded so strange to me.'

'Because you're a sentimentalist. You're frightened of emotions and you try to drive them brutally away. You're still not tough enough. Have another drink. I'll get you some ghost-writing to do. One hundred and fifty pages on Stoicism, including at least forty on Marcus Aurelius, thirty-five pages on the contemporary biological concept of race, eventually a further hundred pages on industrial development in Germany during the period 1871–1914. That will easily make you enough money to repay Stetten's loan.'

It was not until he was down in the metro station that Doino noticed his financial situation. A first-class ticket would leave him utterly penniless save for a single, five-centime stamp.

He was sure that he must have seen the woman seated opposite before. He looked at her again: she was tall with rather broad shoulders

and she was fully conscious of her magnificent breasts. She sat upright. Her face was on the long side but not too narrow, with fine, generous features and almond-shaped, light brown eyes. After two stations he realised where he had seen her before, where everybody in France had seen her: she was the goddess of the banknotes, portrayed on each one of 100 francs or more. All over the world finance ministries and mints have been deeply influenced by classical art. Many stock exchanges and large banks are actually designed in the style of Greek temples, at least so far as the façade goes. Some time it might be worth while examining the possible causes of this. It was hardly surprising, really, that Hermes should have survived Zeus. On the other hand, the banknotes seldom portrayed Hermes, preferring in general – and he looked at the woman opposite once again – Athene or Artemis. Yes, she was Artemis. And she, conscious of his admiring glance, raised her eyes and smiled at Doïno. The old cliché was in this case true: she bestowed a smile upon him. If women were just, Doïno thought, they would only smile at the Geraldts of this world. Goddesses, however, are by nature generous. At the same moment he remembered that his whole fortune consisted of a single postage-stamp. Should she get off before the Place St Michel, well and good. Should she go on, he would have to get out there all the same.

She remained seated, and he stepped on to the platform. He turned and watched her as the tram moved off, and he knew that his sad smile did not make him any more attractive. Back in his room he looked into various books in order to refresh his memories of Artemis. There were numerous pictures of the goddess; in one she was portrayed with such a multitude of breasts that any normal man must surely have recoiled in fear and trembling. But there were other, more seductive pictures, though none as enchanting as the banknote goddess of the metro first-class. He wanted her.

The next day, having completed the necessary arrangements on Edi's behalf, he decided that he would devote four days to looking for that woman. Paris is of course very large, but he was quite certain that he could find her. All that was in doubt was whether four days would give him sufficient time. Still he could allow no more. Stetten was already growing impatient and saying that they must get to work and finish their book before the outbreak of the war.

At four o'clock he sat down on the terrace of a café in the Place St Michel. He would spend an hour and a half there before moving on to another. There were six such cafés on the edge of the square. So during this first day he would wait nine hours for the unknown woman. She

had seen where he got out. She would come this way should she wish to find him again.

He saw her at exactly eight o'clock. She was walking down the boulevard. At first he was not absolutely certain it was she, and he hurried across the square to make sure. Yes, that was she all right, that was Artemis, staring with apparent interest at a shop-window filled with smart men's shoes. He moved up beside her and said:

'I've only been waiting four hours – and you're already here. God bless the punctuality of goddesses!'

She stared at him in amazement, her mouth half open – he noticed that she had strong, not very white teeth – and answered with a single word:

'Pardon?'

It was a question, but it might also be a rebuff.

'I must ask you to forgive me for last night, but I had only five centimes with me, and that in the form of a postage-stamp. And of course I had no earthly way of knowing what your destination was. Where shall we take our aperitif?'

'Have you still got your postage-stamp with you? And will it be enough for the drinks?' Now at last she smiled. 'Furthermore I hope you don't imagine I came here on your account. Because let me assure you, I haven't given you a thought.'

'Is that to be the only lie? Or the first of a long series?'

'The only one. After the drinks will you have enough money for our dinner?'

'Probably. In fact, almost certainly.'

'You haven't yet told me your name.'

'I have so many that you can choose whichever fits your fancy. As you see, it's an extraordinary bit of luck for you meeting me.'

She looked at him seriously now and said:

'You don't look like a happy man.'

He did not feel like answering. They walked in silence to the Luxembourg and sat down on the terrace of a café facing the gardens. She asked, shyly:

'Should I not have said that?'

'No, you did quite right. It is a good beginning, because what happens next cannot be worse. As for the ending, we won't think about that yet. It's too soon.'

'You don't believe in God. You never pray. . . .'

'Quite right. The sky above my head is empty, utterly empty. Does that worry you?'

'For myself, I pray. And I go to confession. Not as often as I should, it's true. But I prayed today, in Saint Eustache. And one of my prayers has already been answered.'

'What was the other prayer?'

'That I should remain indifferent towards you. Friendly, but nothing more.'

'And which saint did you ask to arrange that for you?'

'Saint-Theresa of Lisieux.'

She said this seriously, in a tone of calm defiance. He could not take his eyes off her; it was as much as he could do not to stroke her hair back from her forehead or to cradle her cheek in his hand.

'Do you think I'm ridiculous?' she asked.

'No. Belief is never ridiculous. I would never laugh at a believer, though sometimes I find them frightening.'

'Frightening?'

'Yes, like a . . .'

He interrupted himself. He did not wish to hurt her by saying what was on the tip of his tongue: that a believer often, unconsciously, is one who plays with marked cards.

'I almost insulted you. From stupidity. What sort of a man would deliberately annoy a woman at the precise moment when his sole consuming desire is to stroke her hair?'

'There are wretched men who do, though. I have been married for two years, and I hope that the Church will soon give me an annulment. I'm telling you this because I hope now, at last, you'll start to talk about yourself. My name is Gaby Le Roy. Le Roy is my maiden name.'

He told her his name and described his situation in a few words. When he spoke of his ghost-writing at considerable length she was amused.

They ate in a little restaurant, then went to a cheap cinema where three big films were showing. He accompanied her as far as her front door. The next evening she went back to his room with him. She found it less ugly than his description had led her to believe. Carefully she examined the names of the books that were piled in toppling heaps upon the floor; she admired the lime tree as she should, not guessing that she would have to share this strange man's love with that tree.

'You should have woken me,' she said. The brief summer night was not yet over, but she had awakened and she saw that he was not sleeping. 'What are you thinking about?'

He put his right arm about her shoulders; his other hand was beneath his head. He gazed out of the window. Then she knew that he could

shut her out of his mind even when his arm was around her. It was the first pain that he had caused her. They embraced and she quickly forgave him.

Day was beginning to break. They listened to the church bells in the three nearby churches, to the song of the birds that was like a loud and happy quarrel, to the whistle of a distant train.

She did not ask him again to tell her his thoughts, but now he began to speak, more slowly than was his custom. He told her of his friends. To her they sounded strange and foreign. Anxiously she wondered if he too would seem so strange should she hear another man speak of him in this fashion. She interrupted him:

'Tell me about myself! I know I'm not as interesting as those others' – she was curiously agitated – 'but I want you to talk about me!'

He laid his hand on her breast as if to calm her and said:

'When one of my forbears sat down to write a book – usually, I'm sorry to say, on a religious subject – he would begin by thanking God for having let him live until that hour, and he would take the opportunity to flatter the Almighty in no uncertain terms. An author cannot lay it on too thick when it comes to *captatio benevolentiae*. Thus my forbear would laud the Creation as a whole in the most outrageous fashion, would choose some particular fruit of the earth, say, for especial praise, and would bless the Creator on its account in a positive torrent of Hebraico-Aramaic eloquence. I shall begin the same way, Gaby, by praising you, your eyes, your breasts, your lips, your thighs. . . .

'Stop it! You are supposed to be talking about me!'

' . . . and I must thank the Good Lord that he formed you as you are, and that meanwhile, in His infinite wisdom, He arranged that whole countries be engulfed in misery, that my heart be filled with bitterness, that I be made a homeless refugee – for all this He did simply that His sure hand might guide me to this great city, and last night, against my normal custom, that He might lead me into the first-class carriage of the metro in order that I might find you, and . . . '

'You're supposed to be talking about me, not you.'

'All right. So much for the dedication in the style of my forbears. Now then, what do I know about you that I can tell you?'

'Tell me why I came to find you, why I went with you, why I am here?'

'Because you wanted to know what life was like outside the circle of light in which you have been living for the last twenty-eight years.'

'That's not true.'

'When a primitive tribe wants a new Magician-King the men set off to find him in places which normally they seldom visit. The first stranger they meet is he: You see it will be easier to kill him, when the time comes, if the Magician-King is a foreigner.'

She pushed his hand away and said:

'You talk that way because you don't love me. I'm glad I don't love you.'

She left him towards noon and they were to meet again that evening. Within a few minutes he began to await her return. He could think of nothing else. At three o'clock she came back. She was wearing a light blue dress and her arms were filled with flowers and cakes.

'What are you thinking about, Doino?' she asked quickly.

'I was thinking that maybe happiness isn't such a bad thing after all.'

When later they remembered, each in his own way, those few weeks, they found it hard to accept this time as having really formed part of their lives. It was a period that seemed, in retrospect, detached from what had gone before and from what was to come. How else could they account for the fact that for weeks on end they had been happy?

Edi and Relly sent good news from their remote mountain village. They had rediscovered one another; Edi had found himself once more and had also seen for the first time the beauty and intelligence of his son. This alone was enough to make him happy.

Even the Gräfe business was, in the long run, to have a happy ending. Albert had organised a meeting at which he intended to talk about Soennecke on the occasion of the first anniversary of his death. The exact date was unknown, but it was established that Soennecke had been killed in Moscow some time during the second half of the month of June, 1937 - condemned without trial or verdict. Comrades back from Spain were also to address the meeting; they were to speak of their experiences in the Civil War and of the Barcelona trials in which so many innocent comrades-in-arms had been unjustly convicted.

The meeting never took place. On the night before the date fixed, Albert, on returning to his hotel room, found three men waiting for him; they attacked him and beat him up so brutally that he only recovered consciousness next morning. The physical damage he sustained, though painful enough to start with, turned out to be only of a superficial nature. But the mental shock was great. Albert was inexpressibly hurt by the thought that it was 'his own people' who had thus attacked him, and that they had believed they were acting in the cause of the revolution. Stetten had him moved to his quarters and Josmar sat

at his bedside for days on end. But Albert's condition seemed to get worse; he could not sleep for anguish.

Djoura proposed that they send for Mara and that she be entrusted with looking after Albert. She took him to Switzerland, when it was discovered that in the police records Albert was described as 'a double agent of the Gestapo and the G.P.U.'

Albert wrote regular, short, factual letters. Gradually he recovered his equanimity and he also won Mara's friendship.

Josmar was frequently seen in the company of a pretty woman. He told Doïno that she had on one occasion saved his life. They might stay together, even get married, though that, he added, was not altogether easy. The woman, who was German, insisted that they leave Europe; she wanted him to give up any sort of political activity. This was a source of discord between the two of them, but otherwise all went well.

Stetten liked Gaby. He was amused by the coincidence of her having the same name which Melchior had once given to the numismatist's wife. Thus this name had belonged twice, if not three times, to a woman who should not be chosen because of her strangeness and who was yet desired for precisely that quality.

He treated her as though he were her potential father-in-law, made enquiries concerning herself and her family, and ended up by knowing more about her than did Doïno. He set to work systematically, as was his custom, and did not rely solely on the information supplied by a reliable enquiry agency. He got Werlé to introduce him to an uncle of Gaby's, a professor at the *Collège de France*, and within a short time he was personally acquainted with almost all her family. He was playing a part in a drawing-room comedy. His rôle might seem insignificant, but in fact it was not so since he was the only character involved who knew every twist of the plot.

July 14th was a sort of climax for them all. They danced at the crossroads in their quarter. Stetten sat on the terraces of the little *bistros* and watched them. From time to time he would let Gaby persuade him to waltz with her. It pleased him when she said that he was a superb dancer. During the last evening of the festivities there was quite a lot of rain, but it did not worry them. The rain was only doing its duty and they could not blame it for this; it wasn't being malicious. Or so it seemed to them, for they were all in harmony.

A few days later Stetten and Doïno moved to a house just outside Paris. There were no others near it. It was situated on a hillside, commanded a

view of the upper Seine, and possessed a flower garden, a vegetable garden, and four apple trees.

They worked in the big hall on the ground floor, since this was the coolest room in the house. Stetten insisted on regular working hours. They would start each day at ten o'clock and stop at four. The lay-out of the book had been decided long before, and they wrote it in a way that suited them both, starting with the preface and then dictating the chapters in the order in which they would appear, though undoubtedly they would revise the final text. As soon as they had agreed on the form of each sentence, one or other of them would dictate it into the machine.

Although outwardly adhering to their initial plan, they both soon realised that the book would in fact be utterly different from the one they had originally intended to write. They continued to be primarily interested in the sociological aspects of war, but nevertheless there was a change of emphasis as they became more and more involved in the technique of warfare and increasingly interested in matters of strategy. To begin with they had bought, more from a sense of duty than from anything else, a number of lengthy books, often in several volumes, by soldiers and politicians who had played a decisive part in the World War. The authors described the course of events and the effect of their own actions, often in terms of quite preposterous false modesty. It was exciting, if annoying, reading. They devoured thousands upon thousands of pages, becoming convinced of an incredible fact which yet never ceased to astound them: millions of men had been sacrificed simply because the generals had not the faintest idea how such a war should be fought.

A passage from the chapter which led to the first quarrel between Gaby and Doïno. She was in the habit of visiting them two or three times during the course of the week, and frequently spent the week-end. Stetten was always delighted to see her and, furthermore, greatly appreciated her talents as a cook. The elderly widow whom the village mayor had recommended looked after the house quite competently, nor was she actually a bad cook. Strict though fair, she insisted on a regular routine which nevertheless broke down on occasion. Although an atheist, she yet had certain immutable beliefs: one of these was dinner must always start, summer or winter, with a thick soup. Should they refuse her soup then Madame Dupuis would sulk for two days, and when she sulked everyone was made to suffer, humans, beasts, plants, even inanimate objects. Only when Gaby was there would she relax her tyranny and become gentle and obliging. Then there would be no

talk of *potage* and Stetten's triumph, though of short duration, was none the less complete.

Now they were seated on the ground floor, enjoying an excellent meal which Gaby had herself prepared. She was pleased by Stetten's compliments on her cooking, and she asked how their work was progressing, whether they really found the dictaphone useful, and how the two authors could manage to preserve their mutual harmony. In answer to her questions they played back for her the latest roll that they had dictated. Gaby had learned German at school, but she could only understand a fragment of what she heard. She was impressed. Stetten's voice sounded younger and softer than Doino's. At first they spoke slowly, and it was possible to distinguish the sentences; then they began to talk more quickly, so that the effect was that of an animated dialogue. Hardly had one stopped before the other began. The voices grew louder and spoke faster. And now Gaby began to experience a sensation of acute discomfort. She recognised it herself as jealousy, as a feeling that she was superfluous, that she was excluded from some secret community; she was upset.

When the roll was finished she asked that they translate the last part for her. She wanted to know what it was that the two men had said with such vehemence. There were thus three voices audible, the two from the dictaphone, and that of Doino who was translating.

'Never before had there been such arrogant inefficiency, never before had arrogant inefficiency been endowed with such power, the power of sending the flower of Europe's youth to its death. This power was exercised in order to capture a few square miles which the enemy, within days or at most weeks, would then win back at little cost. Scientists and engineers had created this immense fire-power which the military now used with the intelligence of Boy Scouts, the extravagance of pathological spendthrifts, and with that lack of consciousness which has always characterised the grave-diggers of ripe civilisations. Thus they sacrificed regiments, divisions, army corps; thus they taught the dictators that men can be treated like so much manure, and their blood like so much fertiliser, to prepare the ground for the evil harvests to come.

'No, a civilisation is not destroyed unless it be ripe and ready for suicide.

'Pacifists and anti-militarists have accused soldiers of loving war. This argument, based on sentimentality, is foolish, but another is decisive: the soldiers have completely failed to grasp the nature of the great twentieth-century wars. They may possibly endanger peace: they are

an incontestably far greater menace in wartime – to their own country which entrusts its sons to them.'

'Forgive me,' said Gaby, 'but I can't understand a word of this. I imagine you're not talking about the French army. You're referring to some other country – Germany say, or Russia. Aren't you?'

For a moment or two Stetten and Doino said nothing. Then the professor, still under the influence of the delicious *sauce béarnaise* which the young woman had concocted, tried his best to smooth her ruffled sensitivities:

'It is indeed true that the Germans turned down tanks in 1913 on the grounds that they were too expensive and insufficiently effective. We've referred to that at the beginning of this chapter. There you're entirely right, dear Gaby. On the other hand, they did have machine guns, whereas the French . . .'

'A whole class of Saint-Cyr cadets marched straight towards those machine guns, in full dress uniform and wearing white gloves. And we are proud of them, we French! It was the finest moment of the whole war!'

Her face was flushed and her eyes sparkled, perhaps more from anger than from enthusiasm or pride.

'I daresay. Also the responsible officers should have been shot in the presence of the mayors of every single French township,' said Stetten reluctantly.

'How dare you say such a thing, here, in France!'

Since his earliest youth Stetten had felt ill-tempered about women in the way a peasant feels about rain. There's always either not enough or too much, never the right amount and never at the right time. At the moment he was quite certain that there was far too much of Gaby. There was nothing which he regarded as more obscene than the enthusiasm inspired in women by the military heroism of dead young men.

'Why do you say nothing, Doino? You know France, you should . . .'

'I can only say I'm afraid that the next war will find France as ill-prepared as were those Saint-Cyr cadets.'

'You've no right to bring them into it!'

' . . . and this time all Europe may have to pay for it. Here, read this book, it's . . .'

'It's bound to be good. A cousin of my mother's wrote it.'

Stetten now intervened:

'The great-grandfather of our dear Gaby, Joseph-Auguste Leroy, started as a small weaver in Rouen. By the end of his life he was a rich

wool-merchant. The Second Empire suited him down to the ground. Emile Leroy, he was the second son, took charge of the Paris end of the business. He gradually squeezed out his elder brother and bought his sister's share on the cheap; she was married, you see, to an officer who was permanently and acutely in need of cash. Meanwhile Emile, the one in whom we are interested, made a sensible marriage. His wife brought him as dowry two textile mills in the north. Luck remained on his side and he was the first member of the family to write his name in two words.'

'Why are you telling us all this? And how do you come to know about my family?' Gaby was genuinely amazed.

Stetten refused to be put off. He described with a wealth of detail the rapid rise of this bourgeois family, the wise and profitable matches which Emile, Gaby's grandfather, had persuaded his children to make, and which gave the clan a foothold in the best Parisian society: among their relations by marriage they could count past and future ministers, one of whom seemed likely one day to be a President of the Republic, senior officers in the army, an advocate-general, two Councillors of State, several university professors, a member of the *Académie Française*, not to mention numerous important figures in the business world. Thus, should the need arise, there was influence and even protection available – for example, if there were the threat of an enquiry into a certain consignment of inferior quality blankets sold to the army. In case of war, too, there were strings that could be pulled – for example, Gaby's father had been made chauffeur to an army commander, and had thus been spared any exaggerated proximity with the front. The law, too, was not unamenable to tactful pressure – for example, in the case of Gaby's youngest uncle, a man entangled in brutal perversions, who had not appeared in court but had instead been sent to a sanatorium.

Gaby's mother's family was minor, though respectable, nobility. Thanks to her, Gaby's father, Emile-Auguste, had established a pleasant and useful relationship with the Church. The third generation of the family was no longer moderately republican with a tinge of Bonapartism, but moderately royalist and definitely catholic. The Le Roys now owned two châteaux and spoke of the villagers as 'decent, hard-working fellows'. Emile-Auguste was a senator, a member of numerous parliamentary committees, a man whose utterances were received with general respect. Sooner or later he was bound to be made Minister of Trade. Until 1936 he had been violently anti-German; about that time, when the new labour laws were introduced in France, he had begun to express definite pro-Italian sympathies, and since then had gradually

ceased to be ill-disposed towards the 'new Germany'. His wife's cousin, the author of the book on contemporary French strategy which had started Stetten off, had easily persuaded him that France could sleep in peace so long as she avoided entanglements in Central Europe. On the east she was protected by unassailable fortifications, and no one threatened her from the south: was not Italy a sister nation, Latin like herself? Apart from that, there were the Alps. The lesson of the World War was perfectly plain: a well-organised defence was the best strategy. France was invincible, France possessed the finest army in the world, France had the most brilliant General Staff in existence. Provided the old traditions were upheld, there was no danger that France could not override. An epigram of this cousin's was frequently quoted: 'The world could not exist without France, but France is sufficient unto herself.' This general had made another *bon mot* in the Le Roys' drawing-room which had much impressed his audience: 'The English burned Joan of Arc, insulted us for centuries and stole Fashoda: in exchange we saved England on the Marne. That makes us quits'.

Gaby grew more and more annoyed as Stetten went on to attack the middle-classes in general. He spoke of their lack of courage and initiative, of their insatiable greed. Instead of building up the country's industrial potential they preferred to send their capital abroad while they slept on bars of gold.

'Such men boast of belonging to a higher civilisation, but what is required of them is a better quality steel, a more efficient . . .'

'Forgive my rudeness, *cher monsieur*, but I think you are forgetting that you are a guest in our country.'

'If the Le Roys go on the way they are doing, you, your cousin, the whole lot of you, will soon only be guests here too. Demosthenes was a better orator than the man who writes your Premier's speeches. But when faced with the Macedonian cavalry the references to Athenian civilisation proved a wretchedly inadequate defence, all the more so since the Athenian Le Roys had never deigned to hear them, being far too busy listening to the braying of the golden ass.'

Gaby was about to get up and leave the room, slamming the door behind her. But she changed her mind and remained seated. It was all just politics and, as such, no concern of hers. On the other hand, there must be something behind it all. What was he after, this old man who chose to sneer at her family? Did he want to break up her affair with Doino? If so, why? And how dare he insult her cousin, who after all was a French general.

He was talking about the bourgeoisie once again. Lord, how he

loathed them, this conceited old baron! Perhaps he was an emissary of the Hapsburgs; perhaps he wanted France to fight the whole world single-handed so that the Hapsburgs might regain their throne? Everybody wanted France to fight for them – Jews, Communists, Poles, Czechs, Abyssinians, Hapsburgs; they all gambled on France's altruism. Her father was right: Frenchmen should think of France and only of France.

'Can you really find nothing to say in defence of France, Doïno?' Gaby asked. 'I thought you loved this country.'

'You haven't understood, Gaby. Nobody could love Austria more than the professor. Nevertheless, the day the last war started he hoped that his country would lose it as quickly as possible and, better still, at once. You see, he saw in Austria's defeat the only, the final, hope of Austria's salvation. Similarly he hopes that France will win the next war, but he is afraid that she will lose it for this reason: France looks to the past for a picture of the future. In such a situation it's only by stating the most painful truths in the bluntest possible way that one can hope to be of any assistance. What difference does it make whether those truths be spoken by Frenchmen or non-Frenchmen?'

'But you don't know the truth, you don't understand the real France. My cousin understands it, and he says that France is still worthy of the miracle which saved her once before.'

'There you are. That, in a nutshell, is Europe's mortal danger: France is no longer worthy of being saved by a miracle, the Le Roys – forgive me! – are not worthy; indeed they automatically rule out the possibility of a miracle.'

This time she had had enough. She walked out and slammed the door behind her.

'I am rather afraid,' said Stetten, 'that that conversation was not an unqualified success. Let us seek consolation for our contemporaries' follies in this aged bottle of armagnac. During our next life we must make a point of occupying ourselves more with æsthetic matters. Will you please explain to me, Dion, why we find it so hard to believe that a beautiful person can be a fool, and why that particular discovery is invariably painful? For what reason do we expect more from beauty than from genius? Drink a second glass and then set off in pursuit of your Artemis. No woman should be kept waiting for more than half the time she needs to prepare the reproaches that she intends to hurl at her lover's head.'

Gaby made no reproaches. Her anger had evaporated. The sensation of estrangement and loneliness was stronger than the outrage to her

'patriotism'. Indeed, as soon as she had left the men she felt that her remarks, though justified, were misplaced. She said:

'I know nothing about you and you know nothing about me. It would have been better if Baron von Stetten had let me tell you about my family. And of course he knows nothing, he understands nothing, since he sees it only from the outside.'

She stopped and waited in vain for his answer. At last he closed the double doors and, walking across the room, sat down on the stool beneath the window. He gazed at the trees and the distant stone bridge, glittering whitely in the sunshine. She began again:

'It's only three years ago that I regained my faith. My first prayer was frightful, blasphemous. You're not listening to me!'

'I am, Gaby. You prayed a blasphemous prayer.'

'I prayed that my husband might die in his sleep. No, it wasn't really hatred. I was sorry for him more than anything else. But somehow I had to be rid of him. Nobody knew how much I suffered. You're *not* listening!'

'I am, Gaby. Nobody knew how much you suffered.'

'Henri is not really a bad man. He's just useless and weak, indescribably weak. He used to drink himself almost unconscious before he would come near me. You've no idea, nobody has any idea, what disgust is really like. I've almost forgotten myself how it can nearly choke you. For two years I lived that life, that life of being choked. And everyone thought we were a happily married couple. Our receptions were crowded, we were seen everywhere together, and people all said what a handsome pair we were. Do you think it was easy to suffer so long in silence, while I played my part in that farce? But I stuck it out because we were joined together by marriage. It was only when I made that prayer that I realised I must and should give up.'

'What you're getting at is . . .'

'Is that I'm loyal to my family and to my country. It makes no difference to me whether they make mistakes or not. It's wrong to say everything, because some things are better not said. If there are stains that spoil the canvas as a whole, then they should be covered up, and that's neither hypocritical nor stupid. And it's quite unimportant whether or not the attack by the Saint-Cyr cadets was a military blunder, because we know that we're more entitled to be proud of that than other peoples of their great victories. And to do your best to protect the honour of your family isn't hypocrisy either. If I didn't hope and believe that the Church would annul my marriage I'd be with Henri still, in spite of everything. When that has all been fixed and I

can marry you, you'll have to become a Catholic, of course; you'll be naturalised right away, and the Le Roys will arrange for all doors to be open to you, including doors you never could find without their help.'

'Are you talking seriously? Would you really marry me?' Doino was smiling.

'Probably,' she replied. Her tone was serious, almost defiant. 'You're bound to have had enough of this life soon. I mean of the life you lead here in Paris. And once you've had a talk with the Abbé Perret – he knows about you, because I've already told him everything – you'll realise that you and your baron and all your ideas are out of date, because . . .'

He laughed aloud. There was no hint of mockery in his laughter, yet she felt hurt. She rose to her feet as though she was going to order him out of the room. But when she was standing in front of him and looking him in the eyes she was afraid lest she had offended his pride. This pleased her, for thus she could believe that nothing the two men had said had been seriously meant. People who had lost their rightful place in society through no fault of their own were easily made respectable once again; all that was necessary was to arrange that a few doors be opened, and they were once more entirely *comme il faut*. She embraced him maternally and in her heart, too, she forgave him. It was true that everything was now disorder and sin, but the abbé had given her hope and courage. All would be forgiven her once she had found the path out of present sinfulness and had led her future husband along it. 'The Lord does not hate roundabout ways. He knows which roads are in truth the shortest.'

Thus everything seemed about to be smoothed out between them when Stetten came up the stairs. He had a book in his hand which he insisted Doino study that very evening, as it might give him some useful ideas for tomorrow's work.

Gaby asked:

'If you're convinced that the catastrophe is not only about to occur, but is also unavoidable, why then do you bother to write? Your book will be too late in any case, and therefore utterly useless.'

'My dear, the publication of warnings before a catastrophe is almost always a useless undertaking, but there is sometimes sense in having issued the warnings all the same. You can reinforce my argument, Dion!'

'I would add that truth is like an unborn child. When its period of gestation is completed it must force its way into the world. Dostoevsky said that no man may remain alone with truth for long.'

'Then that's something truth has in common with sin,' cried Gaby. 'Sin?' asked Stetten ironically. 'Sin? And what may that be?'

Yes, the professor wrecked their evening. The young woman left the house early next morning, deeply discouraged. She would never go there again. Three days later Doino went to Paris in order to make it up with her. He accompanied her to see the Abbé Perret, who turned out to be a good-looking man in the prime of life. The priest was extremely friendly and steered the conversation round to contemporary French literature; he appreciated left-wing writers as well as Catholic ones. When Doino maintained that the catholic novelists were great masters of human psychology, the abbé said, with a smile:

'Obviously, because they never forget what sin is. Incidentally, I'd be extremely pleased if you would bring Baron Stetten to see me some time. I am at home every Monday evening. We are usually about twenty, and we thoroughly enjoy tearing everything and everybody to pieces. "Better to be unjust twice than boring once!" That, at least, is what somebody said should be our motto.'

Doino promised to come again in the autumn with Stetten. He also promised Gaby that they would never again discuss politics when Stetten was present, that he thought every bit as much of her as of his 'old Hapsburg baron', and that he would talk about her family only with her (and, of course, eventually with the Abbé Perret) and with nobody else at all. He said a great deal more as well, and she came back to the country with him.

That evening she prepared them some fish and Stetten talked about its excellence for the better part of half an hour. Over coffee he began to praise the French way of life, French literature, the countryside, architecture, landscape gardening, woods, highways and old cathedrals of France, and finally the domestic virtues of French women. He even found a few words of praise for the widowed Madame Dupuis.

'Such are my true sentiments. Now will you stay with us?'

Thus the atmosphere became cordial once again, better indeed than it had ever been before. Gaby stayed. There was no more *potage*, each meal was different from the others, and the goodwill was so great that even Viennese specialities appeared on the table from time to time; Gaby had been to see a cousin, whose mother was a Slovak Hungarian from Vienna, and had asked her for the recipes.

Stetten renewed the lease until the end of October. By the time they returned to Paris he hoped that they would have completed the book.

Their chief difficulty lay in describing modern war, an apparently uniform phenomenon, in such a way that its multiiformity might be

apparent to the reader. Almost every theory on the subject of war so far produced was correct and satisfactory so long as the next theoretical work was ignored. For the second theory was equally persuasive, as was the third. Behind all these phraseologies and 'ideologies' there was yet discernable an essential connection. The tendency was to over-estimate this connection once it was discovered, for the simple reason that it had previously been underestimated if not completely ignored.

Was the problem primarily one of the political and military control of sources of raw materials and of markets? It was, but it was also not that alone. No matter what the war leaders may have believed, for thousands of years, indeed since the beginning of history, the main object of war had been the creation of ever larger political units. Villages, city states and principalities had fought one another until such time as conqueror and conquered became forged by the molten heat of war into a single, new unity. Though any particular war might appear absurd, yet they all had an historic purpose: to compel humanity to abandon its strictly parochial attitude and to drive it to live, first of all in terms of provinces, then of regions, of nations, and finally of the world as a whole. The violent blows by which this historical process was brought about more frequently, alas, merely bruised conservative backsides than stimulated brains to think. When the victors were insufficiently perceptive, when they regarded their victory as more than just an incident, and believed that it had created a new and permanent state of affairs, then the same war had to be fought a second and even a third time – until at last the new super-unity was forged and a new flag, which belonged to conquered and conquerors alike, could be hoisted above the ruins and the graves.

Had the French Revolution developed into a European Revolution, Europe in the early nineteenth century would have been a single, indivisible community. In that case nationalism would have remained a revolutionary force in the struggle of the peoples against the old régime instead of becoming a weapon that the peoples used against one another.

The World War, or the Great War as the French called it, had completely failed in its purpose, and had therefore been fought in vain. Instead of serving to unite the old continent it had been a disintegrating force; small nations were declared sovereign states, one hundred years too late and against the whole current of history. Had the international proletariat been capable of fulfilling the mission which 'Marxism' assigned it, it would have recognised and achieved its real objective at the end of the war. But the working-class failed then even as it had

failed at the war's outbreak. The existence of a self-styled socialist Russia made no difference to the problem as here posed: it neither diminished nor increased the danger of war.

Now however, in 1938, it was too late for European unity; this objective was no longer worth striving for. The next war would be fought for the unification of the world. Should it fail to achieve this, then another, even larger war would follow.

Security for individual nations no longer existed, nor could there be a true revolution within the boundaries of a single state. Since the social revolution had not united the world, only a unified world could now make possible that fundamental rearrangement of society which quantitative and qualitative increases in productivity had rendered inevitable.

For a war whose purpose must be to totalise the entire globe, total belligerency alone would suffice. For example, in the next war it would require the full productive capabilities of approximately ten workers to keep one soldier permanently combatant. The various fronts might appear similar to those of previous wars of movement, but their essential significance would be purely tactical. On the other hand, every country would become a strategic front.

The unperceptive politicians and their generals were laboriously preparing their nations for a war to decide whether this or that province should belong to this or that country. It was therefore to be assumed that their strategy would be as inadequate as their policy – at least to begin with. And the only vital question was this: would one war be enough to unite the world? And was that unity to be one of slavery or of freedom?

The next war would always, and by definition, be the last. It would have to be fought over and over again until such time as this problem was solved.

Stetten closed the chapter by dictating as follows:

‘The real, the fateful question is not whether we want the next war – a question which in any case is not seriously asked – but whether the peace that follows will be in accordance with the meaning of history. In fact whether it will be a true world peace or not.’

The rest of the book was devoted to the social and economic aspects of the last war. They had to produce a great deal of statistical evidence, a labour that occupied much time.

More and more frequently Stetten would break off in the middle of dictating and announce that he was too tired to go on. The fullness of summer made him homesick, and this emotion grew stronger as the

days passed. He would not admit it even to himself, but he longed, like a small child, for his own city and for the Vienna woods. Of all the cities of the world this one alone was denied him; it was a cruel thought. He could no longer bear to be abroad. Suddenly everything – the house, the hillside sloping down to the river, the little wood – would seem to him ugly and tasteless. Normally he had no secrets from Doino, but this feeling he kept to himself. When it threatened to overwhelm him he would retire to his room, push a chair into the corner, and sit down facing the wall until the crisis was past.

It was at this period that Dr Grunder died. He had felt his heart grow dangerously weak. With difficulty he had walked down the four flights of stairs and had asked the concierge to send for a doctor. But it was late at night and none of the doctors she telephoned was willing to go out at that hour. At last she succeeded in summoning a police doctor. He gave Dr Grunder an injection. Dr Grunder immediately collapsed, dead.

Stetten was deeply moved when he heard of this. He sat on the terrace until far into the night, deep in contemplation of the strange workings of fate.

The last time he had seen Grunder he was surrounded by Viennese workers. That had been during the Civil War. There had been nothing supernatural about the man, nor was his a particularly magnetic personality, and yet since his earliest youth men had always followed him. It might be that he had needed them as much as they him, that he had never wished to be alone. Perhaps because he was always really alone, as are all true leaders of men.

And now Grunder had died, and dying he had had for company only two persons, both of whom were professionally indifferent to the fate of others. At the end there were two faces he could look to, that of the concierge, hardened by a lifetime in this teeming workers' quarters, and that of the bored police doctor. And this must have its significance too. Whether death completes the web of fate or simply, capriciously, tears it apart is a question that each death poses anew. He could not believe that the death of a man like Grunder could be just a meaningless 'incident'. In that case, what was its meaning?

It was long after midnight when Doino came out and joined him on the terrace.

'They say he had the heart attack while writing. Do you know, Dion, what his last sentence was?'

'No. The title of the article he was writing was: "The Primary Duties of the Austrian Workers after the Second World War."' .

'Yes. That's the sort of subject one would expect him to choose. The

primary duties after the next World War. No doubt he intended to write about secondary and tertiary duties when he had more time. And there he lies in Père Lachaise, so big a cemetery and yet so overcrowded, immediately opposite the wall where the Communists were shot. *Victus victurus*: that was the epitaph he should have chosen. I should like to be buried near him, Dion. Compatriots abroad should lie together, even if they could not stand together during their lifetime. It is a long time since last we saw him, owing to indifference and laziness on our part, yet his death seems to me to leave us even more alone. Why? Is it perhaps because his death reminds me of my own which cannot now be long delayed?

Doino said nothing. He was thinking less of Grunder than of the refugees, those fighters without weapons, growing sick at heart because a life spent in impotent fury becomes ultimately intolerable. Their spirit of revolt was unbroken, but the heart – that old-fashioned ingredient of sentimental verses – the heart could break as in any forgotten melodrama.

'Be that as it may, we must hurry,' the professor went on. 'I wouldn't like my obituarist to write: "Death struck the pen from his hand." Have you thought up an epitaph for me yet?'

'No. You must live many more years. Homesickness keeps a man young because . . .'

'So you know?' Stetten was amazed.

'You asked Gaby to buy you gramophone records of waltzes, whereas at home you always loathed Viennese waltzes. Last week you complained because there were so few dairies in Paris where a man could go and drink a glass of milk. Three days ago you were grumbling that there were not enough parks. In Vienna you never once, to my knowledge, bought a glass of milk in a dairy, and you very seldom ever sat on a park bench. At any moment you'll complain of the colour of the Paris *pissoirs*; in Vienna public conveniences are painted the most beautiful green. You're so young, professor, that you're still capable of being utterly naïve about this unhappy love affair of yours which goes by the name of homesickness.'

'Go on, tell me more,' said Stetten with a smile. 'Very few people, with the exception of course of my lady wife, have ever spoken to me about myself. And yet it would have done me good, or so I'm inclined to think now. Won't you treat me to at least an excerpt from my obituary? I'd like to get the taste of it.'

He went and fetched a bottle of armagnac and two glasses, which he filled.

'Now wrap yourself up in the rug against the damp night air and go to it.'

'Which part of your obituary would you like to hear?' asked Doino with a laugh.

'The personal part of course, about Stetten the man. The other bits – where you show that you're quite as clever as ever I was – make rather less appeal to my vanity. Now stop hedging and out with it!'

A long goods train rattled slowly across the bridge, its wheels giving off a shower of sparks. On the far side of the river a dog barked. Then, when all was still once again, they could hear the slight rustle of the leaves and Gaby's breathing; the window of her room opened on to the terrace.

Doino knew exactly what it was that Stetten wished to hear. Behind his joking manner he was conscious of the old man's great sadness: for the first time in his life he was admitting a need for consolation.

'Erich von Stetten was a noble and chivalrous gentleman. It was for this reason that he never condescended to wear armour. He wished to be vulnerable and to suffer all pain so that nothing which afflicts men might be spared him.'

'So far so good,' interrupted Stetten. '*Nihil humani mihi alienum*. Now please talk less of us both and more about me as an individual.'

It was, of course, all a joke. Doino wanted to distract the old man from thoughts of Grunder and of death. But the longer he talked the deeper he became involved in what he was saying. Stetten's life – banal in its superficial details, yet truly remarkable – lay stretched out before him like a landscape beneath the rapidly alternating light of sun and moon. Time ceased to run and all the past became an almost tangible present, so that his life could be encompassed in a glance.

He spoke of the passions of reason, of the solitude which must afflict a truly mature man among human beings who almost never reach maturity but simply grow older, who live but have no experience, so that for them all experience soon becomes mere repetition. They misunderstand anything that is different from what they have already known; and what is similar they regard as identical.

Gaby had woken up; Doino's words reached her through the open window and she was conscious of the intensity of his tone. She slipped on her dressing-gown and went outside to join them. Once again she had the disquieting sensation that some link existed between the two men which to her would be for ever incomprehensible: that she was excluded from a community which might be more important to Doino than her love. Almost spitefully she sat down next to Stetten. Doino finished what he was saying in French.

'What was that?' she asked.

Stetten answered quickly:

'The obituary of a man who died, a man called Grunder. "Death is no argument either for or against" – that was what he said to me on one occasion, that brilliant Socialist leader. It was in the middle of a life-and-death battle. Only four years ago.'

'Curious!' said Gaby thoughtfully. 'I had the impression that Doino was talking about somebody who might almost have been his own double.'

'The writer, when describing the subject of his obituary, inevitably draws a picture of himself, either as he thinks he is or as he would wish to be. *Humanum est*.'

'Curious,' said Gaby once again. She was distrustful now. They were hiding something from her, excluding her from some new secret.

'Doino was already asleep. Did you really have to wake him up and get him down here for this?'

Stetten fetched a glass and offered her some armagnac. She shook her head. He looked her straight in the eyes and said, smiling:

'So far as I can recall, Nike, the Goddess of Victory, has never been portrayed in a bad temper.'

'I'm not Nike, and I'm not in a bad temper.' Her tone was harsh. 'I just find all this too . . . too stupid. You're always hiding things from me – as if you were a couple of little boys.'

Night was almost past, yet Doino managed to calm her down before dawn broke.

A few days later a series of events began which fully occupied their attention. There was no question of writing. Even Stetten spent hours listening to the radio. Hitler had once again laid claim to the Sudetenland, declaring that this was his last territorial demand in Europe. France was bound by treaty to protect Czechoslovakia's threatened independence and integrity. The ultimate decision lay with France. Should she even contemplate accepting Hitler's demands the whole defensive system of Central and Eastern Europe was endangered; should France give in, that system must collapse. If this should happen France would no longer be a great power.

'The inhabitants of the Sudetenland are Germans. You know that as well as I do,' remarked the official at the Foreign Ministry, a councillor, to Stetten, who had been driven back to Paris by his boundless anxiety. 'Hitler can't be blamed for feeling that he should, or even must, protect them from the Czechs. Besides, it's entirely in keeping with his

announced ideology. We're entitled to believe he's telling the truth when he says he doesn't want any Czechs.'

'This is not a question of the Sudetenland, it's a question of France. If Hitler gets Czechoslovakia he'll be in a terribly strong position when the next war starts. Surely you must see that!'

'Yes and no,' said the official sitting up in his armchair. He ran his hand over his smooth, well-brushed hair, and once again straightened the folders on his desk. Only then did he look straight at Stetten. 'Yes and no.'

Stetten replied in his most forcible manner:

'Yes and no is an acceptable, though inevitably provisional attitude on the part of a young scientist or of an elderly philosopher who at the hour of his death is faced again by the ghosts of his forgotten, youthful doubts. But for a politician . . .'

'I'm not a politician, I'm a diplomat,' interrupted the councillor. 'The inhabitants of the Sudetenland wish to become German citizens. Should France go to war in order to stop them? War for a cause that is not even just? That's not the point, you say. Well and good. In that case you propose a preventive war against Hitler merely because he *is* Hitler? A nation that loves peace as unconditionally as do the French of 1938 is not going to embark on a preventive war. And if we should do so, we would lose it. We have good reasons for paying a high price for peace.'

He got to his feet and walked slowly to the window. To the left they could see the esplanade of the Invalides, to the right the Pont Alexander III. Along the quai beneath them the motor cars passed in quick succession. The waters of the Seine were tinged with gold by the afternoon sun.

'It seems to me, my dear professor, that you have neglected one not unimportant point. Namely, are we sufficiently armed? Have we the means of enforcing the policy which you expect us to pursue? "Guns or butter", and we chose butter. That alone is enough to determine what our attitude during the present crisis must be. You are intending, I understand, to emigrate to Canada. If at any time I can be of any assistance, please don't hesitate . . .'

A week later it seemed that war was certain. France began to mobilise and to take special precautionary steps. The street lights were dimmed and the town darkened as though it might be raided from the air at any minute. These measures engendered a paralysing fear of war; it seemed as if the country had already been defeated and was about to be handed over, defenceless, to a terrible conqueror.

Every day the evening papers printed more special editions. Huge

headlines encouraged hopes which were dashed by the next edition one hour later.

The country did not ask: 'What are we going to do?' but 'What will Hitler do?' Thus are battles lost, and wars, and peace. When the Munich agreement was signed, and nothing happened after all, the nation was not proud: it willingly accepted the wretched happiness of the very poor who feel rich when they find some possession that they had believed lost for ever. The frauds and the fools rejoiced noisily; for them Munich was a victory. For most people it was recognised as a defeat, though a bloodless one. For that reason they chose to regard it as quite unimportant. The memorials to the dead of the '14-'18 war were covered with wreaths and bunches of autumn flowers. To many of them there were attached printed ribbons reading: 'You died for peace - we live for it.'

An even stronger urge than usual drove people out into the autumnal countryside, to the woods and the river banks and the villages where the last of the harvest was being gathered.

Stetten and Doino had returned to the house outside Paris. Was there any point now in finishing the book? They had strong doubts, but they decided nevertheless to go on with it.

On Sundays the house was filled with visitors, some of whom had been invited, while others had just dropped in because they happened to be nearby.

Djoura came, accompanied as usual by a pretty if rather over-dressed woman of indeterminate age. She talked too noisily, laughed too loudly, drank too much, and seemed to want to seduce every man present. Then she would suddenly become tired and fall silent, as though saddened by the inexplicable and wretched failure of some great undertaking to which she had devoted her entire strength. They soon forgot her as though she had never been there, until Djoura took her to him as a shepherd might take up a lamb that had wandered off and fallen into a ravine.

Josmar and his wife brought Jochen von Ilming. He was now entirely bald and had run to fat; only the monocle screwed into his left eye recalled the recent past, the great bard of the 'Germanic renaissance'. When moved by passion the 'steel nightingale' sang again. Then, too, the big words would come tumbling out: 'In me the German soldier is a poet. In me the German citizen is but a contemptible bourgeois. I have remained true to the soldiers of Germany and I have abandoned the Germany of Hitler.' It was rumoured that he controlled, or at least influenced, a group of anti-Nazi German officers from Paris, that he maintained contacts with certain generals who in time to come - in case

of war, for instance – were likely to play a very significant part. His articles were prominently printed by the Communist-controlled press. His signature, along with those of the other émigré writers, was to be seen beneath the constant appeals of the German Popular Front and on the letter-heads of various committees.

Ilming was still highly thought of in certain quarters. He had found his way into a circle of French intellectuals which revolved around a few writers, one publishing house and one periodical. They spoke of him with genuine respect, mentioning him in their articles and referring to his works. Hardly one of them had ever read a book of his all the way through. That was not unusual. For years they had read nothing but one another's works and those of their particular enemies, but they did devote a great deal of time to studying the literary reviews. They were, of course, well aware that the majority of the critics did not read the books either, but a few indications as to what the book was about sufficed: this enabled them to form an opinion of its merits which, in a few carefully chosen words, they could then repeat wherever they went. The more often they pronounced their verdict the more certain they became of their own judgment. In a comparatively short time they managed to forget that they had never read the book under discussion. They were the victims of their own loquacity. It took Ilming a little time to uncover the secret. Then he found that these subtle appreciations were in fact ready-made formulæ concocted, as it were, from very expensive clichés. When at last he realised this he was at first painfully surprised. However, it did not take him long to persuade himself that his books were the exception, that they at least were really read. Furthermore, there was one consolation. He soon realised that there was no need for him to read either.

'For men such as you and me,' said Ilming, turning to Stetten, 'the surrender of the Western Powers at Munich was naturally not a surprise. We know that the decision will not be reached along the Rhine but on the Oder, the Vistula, the Dnieper or the Neva. Whether the Russians or the Germans will finally emerge victorious is important for the next few decades, but ultimately a matter of supreme indifference. For in the end the two great continental powers will unite and rule the world. The Western world is *kaputt*.'

While he talked he wolfed down one cake after another. In anticipation of this visit he had skipped his lunch. It was true that he earned more than most of the émigré writers, but his taste for boys involved him in considerable expense. What he didn't give his 'young men' they simply stole.

Djoura and Doino had retired into the house, so that Stetten had no choice but to reply himself. He did not like Ilming, whose conversation both bored and disgusted him. He had never managed to finish one of his books.

'As of September 30, 1938, the future belongs to the Germano-Slav Empire,' announced Ilming. Regretfully he pushed aside his empty plate. Since Stetten still said nothing, he went on:

'There is no reason why people should not continue to love France. Painters will come to Paris; the secrets of the spring fashions will be unveiled here; but that will be all. Hep! hep! *est perdit*. I have been to Moscow. The state publishing company over there has bought the copyrights of all my books. At a decent price, too! I had hesitated before, but now I've decided. The shortest road back to Berlin is by way of Moscow.'

'Why not go direct?' asked Stetten. His eyes were fixed on a point above Ilming's shoulder. 'Why don't you just get on a train and go straight to Berlin?'

'Because I hate Hitler and his gang. That's reason enough. Besides there's another reason; his lower-middle-class flirtation with that other clown, Mussolini, will bring the country to disaster. We are not powerful enough to execute the great design on our own, and Italy is no use as an ally. Hitler's folly has estranged our only sure confederate, the one destined us by nature and history, Russia. That is why I am going to Moscow.'

'But how about the form of government . . .?'

'... a matter of purely middle-class interest, my dear professor.'

'Nevertheless the destruction of all human rights, the concentration camps, the total supremacy of falsehood . . .'

'Please! Don't disappoint me,' interrupted Ilming. 'With all the terrorist machinery that the Third Reich has seen fit to use it has so far killed about the equivalent of one infantry regiment, call it two if you like – and what does that amount to? Not worth talking about. Perhaps Stalin's Russia has liquidated the equivalent of an army corps, call it two if you like – and what does that amount to? A tiny little tremble, hardly even big enough to register on the seismographs. The masses are invited into the arena and they believe that they will make history. Once they are there it is made plain to them that they are spectators and nothing more. Perhaps a few of the best may be taken on as extras and allowed to shout 'Rhubarb, rhubarb', at the proper time. A small, well-organised earthquake is bound to be useful.'

Djoura, who had returned with Doino, now said:

'You appear to be on very good terms with earthquakes, Herr von Ilming. Your attitude towards them would perhaps be somewhat more intelligent if you had ever experienced one.'

'Quite out of the question. I'm not a member of the masses, the following herd.'

Thea had noticed Josmar's growing uneasiness, and in order to anticipate him she now said:

'On June 30 your friends were murdered and you only just escaped being killed yourself. The S.S. dragged you out of my house, like an animal that was to be slaughtered. I'll never forget it, Jochen. In view of that incident I feel you ought to adopt another line.'

Ilming did not enjoy being reminded of this occasion. He hesitated while he decided what answer he should give: it would have to be either very pathetic or very bombastic or very simple. He said:

'The swine had me in their power, but they were nevertheless so frightened that they did not dare harm me. There are feet beneath which the earth never trembles.'

Thea stared at him, utterly dumbfounded. She preserved an exact, visual memory of the whole incident: men in black uniforms beating Ilming with their whips and bundling him into a car. Silent and unresisting he had let them treat him as they wished. No, Ilming could not have forgotten. So he was lying; perhaps, she thought, he even lied to himself. In any case he gave her no time to reply, for he went right on talking.

'Parties, ideologies, it's all just so much façade! The façade is important, of course, for the masses at least if not for us. The essential question is this: who has the power? He who has inherited it? Sometimes. He who has seized it? Frequently. He whose sole ambition it is to increase it every day, and who can never be satiated? Always. The rest is so much hot air. On one occasion, for example, I sheltered dear old Herbert Soennecke – it was a cold, rainy evening – and put him up for the night. He was a homeless vagabond who thought he controlled a revolutionary party. He wanted simultaneously to lead the people and to be the people. He thought he could be the horse, the cart, the load and the driver as well – all at the same time. And Stalin has liquidated him and all the other fools like him. And rightly so. Stalin is the only one who talks the sort of language in which a man can give orders to history. He alone . . .'

Josmar interrupted him. He struggled to his feet, shouting:

'No, no! I won't sit here and listen to anyone approve of Soennecke's death and praise his murderers.'

He walked around the table towards Ilming. The latter removed his eyeglass, saying quickly:

'I myself saved Soennecke's life once upon a time. I venture to say that I too was a friend of his.'

'Will you shut up!' Josmar had gone quite red in the face and his lips were trembling. Ilming screwed his monocle back in his eye, looked at him with astonishment, and said:

'Oh, I see. You were his boy friend and his death had unpleasant consequences for you.'

If Djoura had not held him back Josmar would have thrown himself at Ilming. Doino now intervened:

'Let us end this conversation. You can begin it again with other, more attentive people when you get to Moscow. You've remained true to yourself and so, of course, are only a step ahead of your friends. You were an ardent follower of Wilhelm II and then of Hitler, and now you're all for Stalin. In Russia dozens of German communists have been murdered and thousands imprisoned – so they're bound to welcome you, Jochen von Ilming, the man who wrote the ode in honour of Rosa Luxemburg's assassins:

*I sing of what you did,
Your fine and mortal blow.'*

'One of my poorer poems,' interrupted Ilming. 'I committed it to paper too quickly. I should be entitled to disclaim something I wrote twenty years ago, but I shall not do so. I still maintain that elimination of that woman was more than a necessity, it was a great deed. Hostile symbols must be destroyed; Rosa Luxemburg had become a hostile symbol.'

No one answered. Josmar was still standing there as though about to hit him, but he was no longer listening to what he said. His thoughts were all with Soennecke, whose death was so certain and yet even now so incredible. Only now, at this precise moment, did Josmar realise that for years he had been awaiting a murdered man, that his every action had been performed in anticipation of his impossible return. It had been that way since childhood; he had always needed an older friend in whom he could have implicit confidence. And now, since Soennecke's death, he had lived without such a friend. He looked about him – neither Doino nor Djoura, nor even old Stetten could take Soennecke's place; no, nor Edi either. That was why he was so lonely. He limped back to his chair. Thea came towards him and took his arm, to help him. She was a good wife to him, and in that he was lucky. She had no idea how lonely he was.

After Gaby had produced coffee and sandwiches there was a noticeable improvement in the general atmosphere. Then they brought the dictaphone out into the garden. Each of the guests was to say a few words into it, as a sort of final message before the cataclysm; meanwhile he was to remember that he would hear it played back to him on the first day after 'it was over', be that in four or in eight or in ten years' time.

Those of them who now heard their own voices coming out of a machine for the first time were startled and even embarrassed, as though they had discovered some new facet of their personality. Ilming, who was one of the last to speak, had had ample time to prepare his remarks. His closing words were:

'History is on the side of the conqueror, and I am on the side of history. Every book I have written shows that. It is true that today I would not write much that I have written. Nevertheless, I withdraw nothing. I withdraw - absolutely - nothing.'

The machine gave increased depth and warmth to Djoura's voice. They all listened to his words as to a song that recalls to memory the atmosphere and the forgotten scenes of childhood. He spoke of the flowers and the trees, the magic of the early autumn sky and the row-boats on the Seine. He spoke of the peaceful, faithful earth which is never untrue to its revolving seasons. Then he spoke of the women sitting about the table, their faces, their gestures, the colours they wore. He spoke of Stetten, who sat listening to his words, and described his features as a man might describe a landscape in a dream. Then he gave the date, the name of the French village, and his own name. In conclusion he said:

'It is hard not to love life; it grows ever harder to love men. I have no wish to die. I am not sure that I wish to survive the coming war.'

CHAPTER IV

THE winter was drawing to a close. The remnants of the Spanish Republican Army was straggling over the icy, snowbound mountain tracks into France. With the soldiers came old men, women and children. The sufferings of the defeated were limitless. Those who should have helped strove as quickly as possible to forget them, for they wanted to silence their bad conscience and to banish the foreboding that this defeat was only the prelude to a much greater disaster.

'If it's secret hopes that have held you back, they must by now be finally destroyed. So what are you waiting for? This is the last time that I propose to discuss our departure. If you can't decide now, I give up. We'll stay here in Europe and die here in Europe.' There was bitterness in Stetten's voice.

Doino did not reply. For weeks now the professor had been urging that they go, and rightly so. Yet an insurmountable barrier seemed to prevent Doino from accepting the idea of leaving Europe. No matter how great the desire of the democracies to buy peace at an ever-rising price, war was already unavoidable. It was bound to begin in this year of 1939. Could Doino therefore run away, could he desert? If he even attempted just to observe the impending struggle from afar, it would deprive his whole previous life of all its meaning. So he repeated what he had already so frequently said during these last few months:

'I beg you, professor, go without me. I shan't leave Europe. Save yourself, because I cannot be saved in that way.'

'I shan't move unless you do. You're condemning me to be destroyed with you, to become a wretched hostage in the hands of the Gestapo.'

This was supposed to be their last discussion of the subject, yet Stetten kept urging Doino to make up his mind and leave with him. They both became irritable. Doino let whole days slip by without visiting the professor, and for the first time their friendship was really in danger. This miserable, long-drawn-out quarrel, in which they repeated over and over again the same arguments and even the same words, made them both unhappy.

Doino was making less money than before and had had to move into a cheaper room, a tiny garret. Nor was he getting enough to eat. He refused to accept any help from his old teacher now that they were on such bad terms.

He seldom saw Gaby. They had broken off their affair months ago, immediately after the Church had annulled her unhappy marriage. The young woman's intentions were clear and good, but she had failed to convince Doino. They spent whole days quarrelling bitterly and with a virulence which shocked them both. Either, she thought, he suffered from some unusual form of insanity which was only apparent to her, or else he did not love her at all. Weeks passed without their seeing one another. She waited in vain for a letter. Sometimes, at night, she would suddenly awake, certain that she had heard his voice. She would jump out of bed and run to the window, but there was nobody in the street below. Once the telephone rang very late. She picked up the

receiver and answered. At the far end of the line she could hear somebody breathing; she called his name, begged him to speak, but there was no reply.

One rainy afternoon she sat down on the terrace of a café in the Place St Michel, determined to wait there until he came by. He did not come and she returned home, frozen. She was sure that she had caught a bad cold and she went straight to bed. She was disappointed next morning to discover that she was not in fact sick. She went back to the Latin Quarter and waited in another café. Late that afternoon she went to his hotel. There was a strange woman in his room, and only then did she learn that he had moved elsewhere. Her heart was pounding as she climbed the six flights of stairs to his garret. When she was outside his door she wanted to turn around and go down again; at last she walked in without knocking. He was seated at his typewriter, bent forward so that the lower part of his face was in shadow, while the upper, the bridge of his nose, his forehead and his grey hair, were too violently lit up. She was horribly startled and she cried:

'My God, what's the matter with you?'

And when he rose to his feet she went on:

'I'm sorry, I was suddenly scared. I don't know why. There's a strange woman in your room, your old room. This one's horrible, why did you move? And your tree, you haven't got your tree here. Why don't you interrupt me? Why don't you say you're pleased to see me or something? What are you writing?'

'I've written twenty-three pages on *The History of the Shoe Throughout the Ages*. A boot manufacturer ordered forty-eight pages and he's got to have them by the day after tomorrow. It's not easy because it's an extensive subject, and one that the majority of historians have carelessly ignored up to now. And this is the first eleven pages of a pamphlet to be entitled *An Outline for the Reconstruction of the Workers' Movement after Hitler's Defeat*. Only five more pages to go. It will be the first of a series to be published by Edi and his friends. The toy factory is not doing too badly and they plan to devote their initial profits to the cost of printing the...'

'I'm sure you haven't eaten today. Come along, it's almost eight o'clock. Have you still got your five-centime stamp?'

'The stamp! How young we were then, you and I!'

'It's only a few months ago. We're not all that older.'

He shook his head. She waited in vain for him to speak, to come to her, to take her in his arms.

'I've been waiting for you all these weeks,' she began again. 'Why didn't you come?'

'There's no dancing with a corpse.'

'You're not a corpse. And I love you.' She raised his hands to her mouth and repeated between sobs: 'I love you.'

He drew his hands gently away and put his arms about her.

They went to a cheap *prix-fixe* restaurant. They hardly touched their food.

'I'm on bad terms with Stetten. I haven't seen him for four days.'

'Is that longer than the eight weeks, nearly eight weeks, that you haven't seen me?' she asked angrily. 'I'm a woman, and I came to you. Why can't your old baron take the first step? He's always tried to make trouble between us. Do you know what he is? He's a nasty old mother-in-law.'

He laughed aloud. She wanted to convince him and she went on talking about the professor, accusing him of all those things for which she should have blamed her lover. When the *Crème Chantilly* was brought she called over the exhausted waitress and complained in very strong terms that it was neither thick enough nor fresh. Doimo excused himself and went to telephone.

'Forgive me, Professor, for ringing at this hour.'

'It is late, but not too late for him who waits.'

'I just wanted to tell you that I've made up my mind. I'll leave.'

'No, Dion. After mature consideration, as the Emperor Franz Joseph said when he began the World War, I've decided that I don't want to travel any more. There is no sense in discussing it. How about you? You haven't managed to starve to death during the last few days then?'

'Things are looking up. My history of the shoe has reached the Renaissance. Page forty-eight isn't far away and I'll soon get to the triumph of the autumn styles, anno 1939. In three days I'll be rich. Incidentally, did you know that the pointed slipper . . .'

'I didn't. But I do know that you've been living on butter-milk and bread. Come to breakfast tomorrow. I've got some exciting news for you about the latest excavations in Syria.'

As he came back to the table Gaby said:

'It's absolutely incredible this place, they give you a *Crème Chantilly* and . . . What's happened? You go to the lavatory and you come back looking cheerful.'

'Stetten sends you his regard. I gave him your telephone number because he wishes to invite you to the theatre. He says he'd be proud to be seen with you at the *Athénée*. He also says that *La Guerre de Troie n'aura pas lieu* seems to him a particularly suitable title for a play to which to take a member of the Le Roy family in the year 1939.'

'Well, are you going to marry me or not?' She tried to say it as though it were something of a joke.

'After the Trojan War, Gaby. If you're prepared to wait as long as that.'

'There won't be a war,' she announced with certainty. 'It's logical. Now eat up your dessert. The proprietor gave in and brought us some fresh cream.'

A fine type of Frenchwoman! Undoubtedly, too, she knows which shops on which days sell household goods a few centimes cheaper. Brooms, floor polish, and toilet paper must be bought only on Thursdays! She also knows what are the proper adjectives to use when discussing Paul Valéry's latest lecture. And she knows exactly when and where to make the pun about the Premier's titled mistress, or to repeat the charmingly vulgar remark attributed to the Cardinal of Paris. Similarly she knows that there won't be a war because in the Senate's Military Committee . . . because the *chef de cabinet* of the Foreign Ministry . . . because only yesterday the Chief of the General Staff . . .

'You're quite right, Gaby, the *Crème Chantilly* is delicious. But as for the war . . .'

'In any case, we won't have our coffee here. I don't trust this place.'

She went with him to help him clean up his room and then, because she was over-tired and it was raining outside, she decided to stay. This might be their last night together. She was determined that they should not quarrel, neither about war nor about marriage, and Stetten she would not even mention. Doino could not deny that it made him happy to be with her. Everything else, she thought, was unimportant, except that she must be more patient. In a few months he would, thanks to her, give up those crazy ideas about impending catastrophe. Then he'd have had enough of Stetten and of his friends and of the poverty in which he lived. It was mad that she should have to sleep with him in this garret when she had seven rooms of her own. As she was dropping off to sleep she looked at him, at his hands holding the book. What a funny fellow he was! A few minutes ago her body had been all that mattered to him in the whole wide world; he had been blind and deaf to everything else. And now there he was, reading about shoes in the Middle Ages or the workers' movement after Hitler's fall. 'If I should scream for help now he'd only hear me the fifth time I shouted. What a funny fellow, what a very funny chap!'

She did not know whether she had been asleep for hours or only for minutes when she was awakened in the darkness by a soft, insistent

knocking at the door. She woke Doino, who opened the door and went out on the landing. He did not come back at once, and she began to feel frightened. Putting on her coat she went to look for him. When she called his name he came to her and said:

'It's Djoura. With Albert and another man. I must talk to them at once. I'm very sorry, but I think the best thing would be for you to get dressed quickly and go home.'

She was furious and refused to go at that hour. Why could those men not come back next morning? Djoura tried to calm her down, but she simply turned her back on him and went back to bed. After a little while Doino brought the three men into the room. The stranger sat down at the table without even glancing about the room. He seemed to be quite unaware of the fact that his hat and coat were dripping wet. His hand trembled as he raised a cigarette to his lips. He smoked quickly, greedily. Since he was seated immediately beneath the light Gaby was able to see his face clearly. Each time he puffed at his cigarette he would throw his head back. She turned her face to the wall. This was all madness. She would try to sleep; all this was no concern of hers.

Albert had sat down on a pile of books near the door, Djoura on the other chair. Doino, standing in front of the stranger, said:

'If you're hungry I have bread and butter-milk.'

'I'm always hungry, but I don't want to eat now. Besides, the comrades here gave me a meal at a restaurant.'

'What's your real name?'

'My real name? In Hungary my Party name was Lajos Földes, in Slovakia Borak or Kis, in Germany I was first of all Georg Dörfler and later Gustav Klar. I come from Pecs, the place they also call Fünfkirchen. It's in Hungary now. My father came from Belgrade and I was christened Petrovitch, Milan Petrovitch. Why do you care what my name is?'

'On the table, under those papers, there's a packet of cigarettes. Help yourself. Take your hat and coat off. How did you get that scar on your head?'

'Two scars, close together. That's why it looks like one. The first was at school, an accident in the gym. The other was an interrogation in Koenigsberg. Sometimes the warders didn't beat me on account of the scar; others it infuriated and they would hit me just there. I don't like people noticing it. I talk too much. Ever since being here I've talked too much. I can't help it, it just pours out of me. And don't stand there in front of me, it looks like an interrogation. Of course, you have to ask

me questions, I can't expect you not to. But I don't like it to look like a real interrogation.'

Doino pulled out two cases from under the bed, put one on top of the other, and sat down beside the man.

'You told Djoura that comrades in Russia had sent you to us. Who sent you and to whom?'

'It makes no difference to me who this woman is, but why does she have to listen to everything?'

'She understands very little German. You needn't worry.'

'That suits me,' said the man. 'All right then. The question is whether I'm an *agent provocateur* or not. You can't possibly be certain one way or the other. Of the four of us here I'm the only one who can know for sure what I am. That's why I say the best thing is for you to listen to what I have to say, to listen to everything I have to say. Maybe then what I am won't seem so important. All you'll care about then will be the truth. I'd have been satisfied just to see Djoura. I know him; at least I know his name because I've read his books. The first one I read that was, yes, that was . . . now when was it exactly? Oh yes, I remember, it must have been just about the time, yes I remember now, it must have been just before I was arrested for the third time. At that time . . . of course you're quite right, Comrade, I'm sorry, I don't know your name, you're quite right, I talk too much, it just pours out of me. I didn't use to be this way, it comes from . . .'

But when he began at last to tell his story and to deliver his message, he was precise and, if anything, too brief.

He had been in a camp in Northern Siberia which he had left seven months before. A dying man, a Russian about to be released, had made him a present of his name and thus of his right to freedom. Unusual circumstances and the fact that some of his fellow-prisoners had sacrificed themselves, had enabled him to get out of the camp. From then on it had been up to him. He could easily have failed but, as it happened, he succeeded. He had managed to cross frontiers; twice he had been shot at and once hit; he had spent twenty-four hours hiding in a swamp; he had almost starved to death; but he had made it. His comrades in Russia, and he himself, had imagined that if he succeeded in getting out he would go to Prague, would find the Communist leaders there, and would say to them: 'Such and such is happening of which you perhaps were unaware, but now you know. You must protest to the Russians; you must threaten, you must insist that they set free at once the tens of thousands of innocent comrades rotting in the prisons or dying in the Siberian concentration camps. Because you can swallow everything

except that. Take the case of the German Communists in the Soviet Union, or the Polish comrades, or the Austrians from the *Schutzbund*.'

Yes, that was how he had imagined it would be. No public outcry, but immediate, drastic action on 'inner lines'. But they had refused to listen to him: they said he was lying. He had then drawn up a list. He had managed to remember five hundred and sixty-three of the six hundred names he had learned by heart, and he had written them down. They were all comrades, men and women, young people – for example, Soennecke's children – who were being killed off even more quickly than in Dachau. Then they said that he was a traitor and they threatened him. So he went to see the leaders of the German Party who were living in exile in Prague. Next he made his way to Paris where he went to the French Party. And everywhere his reception was the same. If he always came up against this brick wall and achieved nothing, what would the comrades back there think? Perhaps that he hadn't managed to escape, perhaps that he was dead. Or they would think that all their sacrifices had been for nothing – the death of the Russian comrade for instance – and that he, Petrovitch, had forgotten them. Over and over again, even while describing what came next, he would revert to that Russian.

He was speaking in level tones. He had stopped smoking and his hands rested upon his knees; only when the rain beat against the skylight did he raise his voice. He described the wave of arrests, the overcrowded communal cells, the solitaires, the convictions without trial or opportunity of defence, the overcrowded railway carriages that transported the prisoners eastwards, the hopeless struggle against the real criminals who were with them, thirst, hunger, the endless marching, the chicanery that went on, the first camp, the second camp; he described how men can be humiliated and debased until they are capable of only one feeling, hunger; of only one sensation, exhaustion, permanent exhaustion.

The three men listening to him sat in a hunched attitude, as though a great weight were being lowered gradually upon each of them, slowly, inexorably crushing them. They knew that the man was not lying. Albert and Doino knew for certain; they had themselves passed through similar experiences in German camps. But their experiences had only been similar and not the same, because they had always had hope on their side. But what Petrovitch had to relate, this flatly delivered message which he had brought them from the far end of the earth, this left no room for hope. It was almost miraculous that he had managed to get through. For months now he had been trying to make himself

heard, and these three men, the first persons who had been prepared to listen to what he had to say, were completely and utterly powerless.

The first time that Gaby awoke she had the illusion that a viscous brown liquid was pouring down from the lamp on to the close-cropped head of the stranger. It was terrifying and she looked quickly towards Doino. He was seated there, hunched forward like the others, as though overwhelmed by sleep or, perhaps, by death. Albert was sitting in exactly the same position. She only came to herself again when she caught sight of Djoura's eyes. He was in the act of straightening himself in his chair; he laid his hand upon his heart.

She thought: 'They won't let me sleep. And the rain, how it beats against the skylight! Oh, I wish the morning would come!' She went back to sleep.

The next time she opened her eyes the three of them were grouped together, standing around the stranger, who had not moved from his chair and was still talking. She tried to listen and she soon grasped that he was reciting a list of names, one after the other. Only rarely did he stop to interpolate some remark, and then the names would begin again.

She called out, softly:

'Doino, why . . . what's the meaning of all those names?'

He turned towards her quickly and said:

'Sleep, Gaby, sleep.'

For a moment or two the others stared at her. She had a suffocating sensation that the whole scene was unreal, that she had strayed into a nightmare. Why was she here? Here? Where was she? This wasn't Paris or France, her own country, this was somewhere terribly remote. She cried beseechingly:

'Doino!'

He came over to the bed and she buried her face, wet with tears, in his two hands. He said:

'You probably had a bad dream. Go back to sleep. Everything will be all right. You won't dream any more.'

He laid her head gently back on the pillow and drew the covers up to her chin. She wanted now to hear nothing save the rain on the skylight, yet on and on, more distinctly than before, went the list of names. Foreign names. Never had the sound of a human voice upset her to this extent. All the same, she was soon asleep.

At last the man had finished. No, he had not told all, for no man can ever do that. But now they knew the truth and the names of five hundred and sixty-three from among the tens of thousands of men and women; and each one of that multitude should have meant more to his

three listeners than did their own hunger or thirst. No, Petrovitch had not yet finished. He was talking about hunger once more, about never not being hungry. Suddenly he broke off:

'You don't understand, nobody can understand. It has to be lived through. Even if you've been in Nazi camps you still can't really imagine what it's like.'

At last he finally stopped talking and began to smoke greedily once again.

'No, you're no *agent provocateur*,' said Doino. 'Albert will introduce you to his friend and he'll take you with him to Norway, today. Yes, you've told us the truth. All the same, for the moment we shall do nothing. . . .'

The stranger interrupted him:

'You're a wit, comrade.'

Suddenly he began to laugh, louder and more uncontrollably, like a man who discovers a joke to be better and better the longer he thinks about it.

'Ha! ha! ha! I tell you the truth and yet you're going to do nothing! Ha! ha! ha!'

The others were silent. The stranger wiped the tears from his eyes, and it was hard to tell whether or not they were tears of laughter.

Doino laid his hand on Petrovitch's shoulder:

'There is just one reason why we can do nothing, and the reason has a name - Hitler.'

The stranger shook off Doino's hand.

'For three hours I've been telling you, in the name of the comrades over there, why you must do something. And as you say, Comrade, the reason you must act has a name: Stalin. It also has five hundred and sixty-three other names which I have given you, names of people who will be murdered if you keep silent. What is the sense in your freedom if you are silent? What is the sense in my flight and my escape? What am I doing here in Paris? What is the point in my going to Norway?'

He jumped to his feet. For a moment he seemed to be fighting for breath. Then he banged both hands on the table and shouted, so loudly that his voice cracked:

'You're mad, mad! I've told you the truth and you're going to do nothing? You're murderers, worse than murderers, you're . . . you're . . . you deserve . . . you . . .'

Djoura put his arms around him and calmed him as though he were a sick child grown violent in fever.

Albert said:

'What Faber means is this: we cannot fight a war on two fronts. Our chief enemy is Hitler, and him we must conquer. And for that Russia is the safest, the only reliable ally. It's wrong to weaken one's allies just before the battle is joined. Do you understand?'

The man had a hard time modulating his voice, but now he did not shout.

'You're mad. Or you're blind. One or the other. Stalin your most reliable ally? Stalin's killed all his allies. And they were stronger than you. But he weakened them first. Stalin – a reliable ally! Mad or blind, that's what you are. But nobody will believe me. Djoura, you, you're a poet, a human being, you can understand what I mean, you at least must . . .'

Doino sat down on the foot of the bed. It was his heart again. He could feel its weakness spreading out along his limbs, and it was as though his legs could not carry him, his hands no longer hold anything, as though his voice must be inaudible. He could hear Djoura talking but as though from behind a wall. And suddenly he knew where and when he had experienced this sensation before. It was less than two years ago, in Oslo. Albert had come to him, desperate, shut up in his frightful loneliness. Albert had demanded that he speak up for Soennecke in an attempt to save him. And Doino had sent him away disappointed. But at the time Soennecke was already dead, as they later learned.

And now this Milan Petrovitch had arrived. And Albert too was present, ready to give good, tactical reasons for their saying nothing. They had already broken with the Party, but they were still its accomplices, still involved in the conspiracy of silence.

Mad, blind? Perhaps it was the truth, he thought, perhaps that was what they were. Everything had to be thought out anew, all ideas of tactics forgotten, it was necessary that . . .

'Yes, yes, I grant you that,' Petrovitch was saying. 'Even the day before I was myself arrested, when so many of our people had already been taken away . . . What am I saying? Even when I had been in prison for months I still believed in the Party and in the G.P.U., and therefore thought that the arrests were in general justified. I was blind, but now I know the truth. You too know, and for that reason . . . But what's the point? If you won't do anything.'

Once again Djoura and Albert were talking to him patiently. He contradicted them once or twice before falling silent. Finally he let them help him on with his coat, put his hat on, made a vague gesture of farewell, and left with Albert.

Djoura climbed up on to a chair and opened the skylight. He looked out. It saw a grey morning.

'Your heart better? Come, take a chair, and climb up here beside me. It's stopped raining. The sight of roof-tops is always comforting; they have such a healthily phlegmatic look, as though they were on the point of dropping off to sleep. Come, you can see the tower of St Etienne du Mont and the dome of the Pantheon.'

They rested their elbows on the roof and gazed out. They wanted to forget both Petrovitch and themselves. For that reason they let themselves become sunk in contemplation of the strange prospect of roofs and towers intersected by the ravines between the house-rows. To the left they saw the Ile Saint-Louis and the Seine; three barges were moving upstream, one behind the other, and on one of them they could see a man with a rope in his hand, pulling a bucket of water up on to the deck. Djoura said:

'Down below in those barges they have their cabins. By day they stay on deck, occasionally watching the banks glide slowly by and looking at the strange people who live on dry land and who always seem to be in such a hurry. Then they are glad that they are different. We should get ourselves one of those boats and travel up and down the rivers for a few months, not ever looking at the banks, not reading the papers, not listening to the radio. What do you think of that for an idea?'

'Not bad.'

'It's good to go on leave from the present. Particularly for a stupid heart that is too cowardly to be a coward and grows weak whenever it is confronted with the danger of being wrong. You should have devoted yourself exclusively to metaphysics and left politics alone. There truth and falsehood have no real effect, in the same way that a poem about the universe has no real effect on the stars or the firmament of heaven, or even on the astronomers. I'd far rather you were a living ontologist than a dead revolutionary.'

'A man is seldom given the opportunity of choosing twice. And the first time he usually chooses according to the form in which he would like to be eternalised. Have we ever attempted to do anything else than bring about a definite and absolute state of affairs, as, for example, the classless society? That is a form of eternity, like paradise. In comparison with what we have attempted, all metaphysics is either just chatter or second-rate poetry. Only people who believe in God are in a position to stand up against us. The others can't.'

'Couldn't you learn to believe in God?' asked Djoura.

They both laughed. Then Doino said:

'Even if I became a believer, God would still speak to me through the Alberts and Petrovitches of this world, and I could never become reconciled to the present. God would insist that His Kingdom must be of this earth and nowhere else.'

'I see. In that case you must consult a good heart specialist. I've sold a film script and I've plenty of money. You must take another room and get your health back. The scenario in its final form, *sub specie aeternitatis* you might say, is utterly plum stupid. The beginning isn't too bad. It starts like this . . .'

While going down the stairs Djoura could imagine as clearly as though he were actually there the scene that must be taking place in the room he had just left. Doino would be embracing the young woman in a passionate search for consolation. And she would believe that the last night of the estrangement between them was over, that now he would belong to her for ever. But during the course of this night she had finally lost him.

In the *bistro* he stood at the counter and ordered a coffee while thinking of the story he was going to write. He might even expand it into a short novel. That wouldn't be such a bad title, incidentally: *Short Novel*. He would begin with a description of the scene that was even then taking place in the garret. No dialogue, just description. Afterwards the reader would understand that the protagonist was in the grip of some passion which endangered his normal life and which must be kept secret. Never, not even at the end, would the reader be told what exactly that passion was. That was quite unimportant and, besides, even if the reader were told he wouldn't understand. Then a long flash-back, and it all becomes clear; the passion is burned out in the man, so that during the scene with the girl he has even managed to forget it. Then he goes down to buy flowers. But the girl will never get them. She will never see her lover again.

Djoura asked for change for a franc. He put a twenty-five centimes piece into the machine and pulled the handle. Green, red, yellow. If the colour that came up had been green he would have won fifty centimes. Why would she never see the man again? Is it in fact true that a man is more faithful to his love than to his beloved? That he seldom chooses twice? He backed green a second time and lost. Yellow again. Now he backed the red and once again it was yellow that came up. He must go home, have a sleep, and then work out the whole thing with a clear head. Now at last he had won his fifty centimes. The appearance of Petrovitch must destroy Doino's relationship with Gaby. That was

certain. But why? To answer so simple a question he did not need to sleep. He left the *bistro* with the intention of walking home along the Seine. Once he had succeeded in transposing the whole business, the motives would become automatically obvious. The easiest part was finding motives for action or for failures to act. One human being equals one million motives. But only one, or at the most two, of his actions are likely to interest the scenario writer.

CHAPTER V

The *Sociology of Modern War* was published in German by a small Parisian publishing house. Stetten had paid the costs of printing; the most that they could hope to sell was some four hundred copies. The book was received in silence. The German émigré press, almost entirely controlled by Stalinist Communists, ignored it because Doino's name appeared on the cover along with that of Stetten.

The only direct result of the book's publication was nevertheless immediately apparent. Stetten's entire fortune in Austria was confiscated, and his accounts in Swiss banks were blocked in accordance with an official request made by the German authorities. The legal grounds on which this was done were that Marlies was suing Stetten in the name of his grand-daughter, Agnes.

The professor was not particularly worried about the law-suit. He reckoned that his money would last for some six months. He calculated that almost exactly on his seventieth birthday – January 16, 1940 – he would for the first time cross the invisible line which had hitherto separated him from poverty. He was curious to know how he would react to being poor. He did not believe that he need be frightened of it.

However, in order that his money might last until this birthday, it was still necessary that he economise. He took two rooms in a hotel; one would have been quite insufficient, for his books alone took up that much space. He should have sold them, but he had long ago bequeathed them to Doino in his will, and for many years, therefore, had no longer regarded them as belonging to himself.

They now lived in adjoining rooms. Doino slept with the books, and they worked in Stetten's room.

Summer came and the city rapidly emptied after the festivities of July 14. These latter had been particularly splendid this year; it was

almost as though everyone realised that the end was approaching, that the city must soon lose its gaiety. At least so it seemed to Doino and his friends. They wandered through the streets watching the dancers, but this year they did not themselves dance. Life had grown grimmer for them all during these last few months. Also they had just received news of Petrovitch's death. The Norwegian Socialists had taken him in and had seen to it that he lacked for nothing; then one evening he had thrown himself under a train. He had left a letter in which he accused Doino and his friends of cowardice and of complicity in the 'greatest swindle, the greatest betrayal'. They could not decide whether or not they should publish it. All over the world the various Communist Parties were preaching a policy of maximum resistance to the Nazis. They were the principal and most active advocates of fighting against Hitler. Doino and his friends therefore decided not to publish the letter. They did indeed attack the Party on 'inner lines', but they said nothing against Russia. The strongest arguments against Nazi Germany would appear feeble if the world were informed about the existence of those camps from which Petrovitch had escaped. His message must remain secret.

Often towards midday Stetten and Doino would go out to the Bois de Vincennes, only returning to the city in the evening. Their rooms were seldom cool before midnight. Edi, Josmar and their wives frequently accompanied them. They had had to sell their toy factory for a ridiculous price because the authorities had cancelled Georg's, the technician's, labour permit, and a little later the police had escorted him to the frontier. He had managed to return illegally, but it was too dangerous to employ him now. He tried to make money as a salesman, selling billiard balls to café proprietors, but this venture was a failure; he next invented an extremely good shoe-polish, but did not manage to place it; finally, he was the victim of a trivial accident. He was stopped for crossing the street outside the authorised pedestrian crossing-places. The policeman asked to see his identity card. As a result he was sentenced to six months imprisonment for having returned illegally to France. Each day the Western democracies, in their fear of Hitler, retreated a little further; but never a day passed in which they did not achieve a victory of this sort over Hitler's enemies.

Nevertheless they were all agreed that six months in prison, to be followed by expulsion from the country, was mild compared to the treatment he could have expected in Germany or Russia.

'I admit,' said Stetten, 'that it's quite pretty here. But you can't call this handful of trees a proper wood. Besides, too many roads run through it, and there's too much dust.'

'Quite,' replied Doino with a smile. 'Also we need more dairies, and *pissoirs* painted bright green, not to mention the *Wienerwald*.'

They usually picnicked in the same spot, and they felt doubly exiled when they found it already occupied by strangers. Relly and Thea prepared their meals in the open there. They were one big family which, like many other families with insufficient means or too many children, could not afford to go to the seaside. In general they all got along well together, though on occasion there were violent arguments when bitter words passed between them. But such incidents never lasted long.

Josmar and Edi were still busy with their political and technical plans. They had not succeeded in getting over their recent disappointments, but nevertheless they felt they must go on.

Doino was fully occupied with his ghost-writing. He had to deliver in the near future an opus of some three hundred pages, a history of vehicles. This would be a world-wide success for the famous writer whose name was to appear on the cover. The American publisher alone had already sold many thousand copies before publication. A full-page advertisement consisted of a photograph showing the author at the wheel of his yacht. (This photograph had itself won a prize, incidentally.) Beneath it, in stylish Gothic lettering, was the author's name and finally, in red, the title of the book; *And Yet I Move On*. . . . The sub-title, italicised and shaded, read; *The Autobiography of Humanity's Greatest Servant*. Diagonally across the corner of the advertisement was written: 'Author and publisher are agreed that this absolutely unique and decisive study of human history must be regarded as a failure if it sells less than 875,000 – EIGHT HUNDRED AND SEVENTY-FIVE THOUSAND – copies within a year of publication'.

Stetten found all advertising amusing and he preserved this page.

'This document is most illuminating of the age in which we live, and a reply is essential. As soon as you've been paid your princely cheque for writing the thing we'll put in another advertisement: "Our book has already sold 67 – SIXTY-SEVEN – copies. Should it succeed in finding a further 33 – THIRTY-THREE – purchasers, we shall publicly acclaim it to be 1939's most staggering success." Then our signatures – in facsimile, needless to say. We successful authors have to do these things in style.'

For the rest the professor was preparing another work. He was collating material about political assassination. As soon as Doino had finished with the vehicles he was to co-operate on this study of terrorism.

Such was the summer of 1939. Neither unusually hot, nor unusually wet: meteorologically, in fact, quite unremarkable. All France seemed determined to take a holiday. Never had there been such crowds at the seaside, along the river banks, in the mountains and valleys and in the sleepy, remote country villages.

That spring the Spanish Republic had been erased, Czechoslovakia occupied, and little Albania no longer existed. Now the papers were filled with news of Poland and of a place called Danzig. Wars generally began in early autumn, after the harvest was gathered. That was what people were saying. Most of them planned to return from their holidays by August 15th or, at the latest, by the 31st. There certainly would be no war before then, and probably none after. Danzig indeed! That doesn't sound like the sort of place for which world wars are fought. On the other hand, there's no telling. What did they want most of all, those people enjoying their holidays? A bit of peace and quiet. After all, they said, they were entitled to it, weren't they? And yet *they* wouldn't leave them alone. The holiday-makers snatched the latest editions of the newspapers from the capital – aeroplanes dropped them in bundles on to the beaches – and sure enough Adolf had gone and made another speech. What did he say yesterday then? What did he say? And what will he say tomorrow? On the other hand, if it should really come to something, well, then there'll be some surprises! All the papers were full of enthusiastic reports on the Red Army: whole regiments of parachutists, the Russian tanks, the Red Air Force, and those tough-looking lads marching across the Red Square. Last time, well, it wasn't quite the steam-roller the world had been led to expect. In fact the Russians had run the wrong way, and finally they'd chucked in their hand at Brest-Litovsk and left us alone with the Germans and our Russian bonds. But this time we haven't got any Russian bonds, and the Russians have an army that isn't waiting for us to ship them their guns. And they've got a man at their head who knows what he's about.

And then there was that story about a robbery from the Louvre. Most interesting! Before the first war somebody stole the Mona Lisa. This time it was a smaller picture but one painted by a Frenchman. And then it transpires that it wasn't a genuine robbery but merely a cheeky advertising stunt. The young people wanted to make a stir and stole the picture for the publicity in the papers. Really, too stupid! To swindle the public like that! To begin with everyone thought it was some criminal master-mind, and then – no, you must admit, really . . .

And then came the news. And some people, particularly those of the Left, said that it was just another such stunt, just another attempt to fool

the public at the eleventh hour, just another shameless trick – like the people who stole that picture. One newspaper carried on its front page, in enormous letters, the headline: **MÔNSTROUS LIE BY OFFICIAL GERMAN NEWSAGENCY**. And the other morning papers – those whose foreign editors were always so incredibly well informed that they knew all the most closely-guarded secrets of all the ‘Chancelleries’ – they simply offered no comment, preferring to ignore the whole story.

Then came the midday papers. There could no longer be any doubt. Ribbentrop was on his way to Moscow to sign a non-aggression pact. The French and English delegations could pack up and go home. They had acted as a smoke-screen, but now there was no further need of their presence, the game was over and the real business about to begin.

The pact was signed after midnight, early on the 24th, St Bartholomew’s day. Stalin and Ribbentrop were photographed together, smiling for posterity, cordially shaking hands. Then the leader of the world revolution and of the anti-fascists proposed a toast: ‘I know how much the German nation loves its Führer – I drink to his health!’

RUSSO-GERMAN PACT SAVES WORLD PEACE. Such were the headlines with which, next morning, the Communist press presented the news to its dumbfounded readers. Yes indeed, Stalin the genius had bound Hitler’s hands; this time there would be peace without the need of retreating another millimetre. In any case, the Communists were now, as before – in fact even more than before – in the very vanguard of the fight against fascism, at the head of the defenders of peace and of the motherland, and so on and so forth. And the non-aggression pact of course in no way affected the conditions of the Franco-Russian alliance. Thus wrote those papers. And their readers, determined and accustomed to believe anything they read in the Party press, were the only people who did not know war to be imminent. They were amazed when it began; Russia had so often saved the peace of the world, after each of the Moscow trials this had been invariably and most loudly stated in the Party press. The more old Bolsheviks who were slaughtered, the safer was the peace. Finally Stalin had sacrificed the leaders and organisers of the Red Army in order to prevent war. Now he had of his own free will signed the Russo-German pact – and seven days later the war began. The faithful did not want to doubt, only it should all have been better explained to them, so that they could understand completely and be able to persuade others that what had been done was right.

On September 2nd the Communist Deputies in the Chamber voted for the military credits. Therefore the war against Hitler was a just and good war. For five years they had been shouting themselves hoarse:

'Hitler is the aggressor. He must be smashed'. Everything else that happened must be immediately forgotten. No, there was no change in the Party line – and this could only mean one thing: that Russia would join in the struggle against Nazism very soon, perhaps tomorrow morning, perhaps this evening. Ho! ho! Stalin knew what he was up to! He'd certainly made a monkey out of Hitler!

Stetten said:

'It is now really quite impossible to say whether the Communist or the bourgeois press is the more contemptible. When I read those papers which glorified the Munich pact, which urged moderation on the betrayed Czechs, and which now are so hysterically expressing their sense of moral outrage at the Russians' bad faith, I cannot help recalling that among whores "whore" is a word of abuse. That should please a moralist. But Werlé quite rightly accuses me of having always neglected morality. On the other hand, when one reads in the same bourgeois papers, that Stalin has compelled Hitler to encourage Communism in Germany, one is inclined to forgive a lot. Limitless as is the cynicism of journalists, their stupidity is far, far greater. *La colère des imbéciles déferle sur le monde*. So wrote Bernanos. It is remarkable and it is a pity that it should be left to a Catholic to make so acute an observation. And as for your former friends, my dear Dion, their congenital mendacity has reached a new high: all faith becomes, in the most natural way, bad faith. Their lies are as total, as totalitarian, as those of their new allies, the Nazis; truth for them is merely incidental, an accident. You yourself disputed the value of private truth once upon a time, saying that you preferred error so long as it was collective error. Now your aspirations of those days have been fulfilled, your chickens are coming home to roost with a vengeance. Private truth will soon become the well-guarded secret of a few individuals who are in constant danger of either forgetting it or of dying on account of it.'

The days and nights were filled with talk. Meanwhile Doino had found time to stand in a queue for four hours in order to volunteer for service with the French Army. His call-up papers might arrive any day. From early morning until late at night the two rooms in which he and Stetten lived were constantly filled with visitors. People came with whom Doino had broken off relations at the time of his leaving the Party; now they too had grown doubtful, and it seemed to them as though the earth was no longer solid beneath their feet. The Germans were particularly uncertain, for they had realised, more quickly than their French friends, that the deed perpetrated in Moscow had, with un-

speakable cruelty, rendered valueless all their past sacrifices. One of them said: '... as though we must ourselves drag the corpses of our murdered comrades from the ground and throw them to the dogs – and, what's more, cheer while doing it. That's what it looks like to me.' He was a big, brawny man, with a face that was atrociously disfigured by a wound received during a street fight in Chemnitz. Scarcely two years had passed since he had drawn up the resolution in which Doino was condemned and pilloried as a 'deserter and a double-faced pseudo-ideologist'. Now he sat on the foot of the deserter's bed, gripping with both hands the wooden bed-end as though he were afraid it might collapse on top of him. Over and over he repeated the same sentence:

'If the Party's finished, *kaputt*, then there's nothing left. The comrades back home won't understand at all.'

Towards evening he fell asleep where he was sitting, his mouth wide open. Stetten, who wanted to be rid of him, woke him up and asked:

'Two years ago you described Faber as a deserter and a traitor. What do you want from that traitor now?'

'Two years ago he was in fact a traitor,' the man replied loudly. 'There's no arguing about that. You mustn't forget the tactical situation, never for a moment. You can't understand that, not being a Communist.'

'And you? What are you now yourself?'

'If I knew that, by God! If I only knew what I am, if only there were a clear directive, a line!'

'You won't find one here. The best thing you can do is to go away and look for it somewhere else, at once!' There was sarcasm in Stetten's voice. The man looked around for Doino, but could not see him. Awkwardly he left the room.

Later that evening a French comrade arrived. For a long time he sat in silence, listening while the others talked, as though awaiting the words that would finally make up his mind for him and solve his problems. Then, without any introductory remarks, he turned to Edi and said, in broken German:

'It's ridiculous and I hate to confess it, but I'm ashamed. I'm quite simply ashamed. When the telephone rings I don't answer it. I don't want to see anyone. Every day for years I've written three pages against Hitler, every day, regularly, against anyone who has dealings with him, against Munich. Every day I've held up Stalin as the shining example, our one sure ally. I've swallowed so much filth, so many lies. Now I'm ashamed.'

Josmar said:

'Let us for a moment try to see the other side of the question. Suppose Stalin were retracing his steps back to a revolutionary policy, back to Lenin's revolutionary defeatism? I don't believe it, but it's still worth thinking about.'

Edi answered vehemently. The argument between him and Josmar became violent and soon all the others fell silent. Finally Josmar said:

'No, there can be no doubt about it any more, Russia is definitely against the interests of the proletariat and has stabbed the working class in the back. Stalin is trying once again to use the workers' movement for his own political interests, and he's its enemy. The most urgent task is immediately to destroy his influence once and for all. But nevertheless,' Josmar added softly, 'why not wait for a few days, or even a few weeks? Perhaps the whole thing may be only a very clever trick after all. Russia might be mobilising in secret and planning to attack Hitler when he least expects it. Let's wait a few more days. We've kept silent for so long that a week or two more won't make any difference.'

The discussion became more general. Stetten did not take part in it, for he was too preoccupied in observing the curious relationships that existed between all these people. There were some who had been expelled from the Party as early as 1924, some in 1928, others again who had left the Party four or five years later, some during the period of the Moscow trials. They were now being joined by the men who had held on the longest, such as this French newspaperman. It was possible to recognise exact degrees of bitterness, of loneliness, and perhaps also of courage. Those who had left in the earliest waves of expulsion had a certain resemblance to defrocked priests or to schoolmasters who had long been deprived of their pupils and who were therefore anxious to instruct and educate everyone they met. The most recent were like officers who had left the service too young and who had not yet grown accustomed to the fact that they no longer had any troops at their command. Here, too, the General Staff officers were easily distinguishable from the others. Stetten was surprised and amused by this discovery. He and Edi were the only outsiders.

During the night of September 3rd - France had been at war since five o'clock that afternoon - the air-raid warning sounded. The wailing of the sirens re-echoed terrifyingly in the dreams of those who slept, so that when they awoke they had to free themselves from a fear which seemed to come from the very deepest part of their being. Everybody went down to the cellars. When at last they could go up again the air-raid wardens gave much contradictory news. Some had seen whole fleets of aeroplanes, others just a single plane, others again nothing save

a cloudy night sky which presaged rain for the morning. Those people who went back to bed in order to snatch a few more hours' sleep were soon awakened a second time. Now, however, the sirens were no longer so terrifying.

Only towards dawn could they leave the cellars again. Stetten accompanied Doino to his room. They had both given up all idea of sleep.

'Tonight marks the beginning of your return to Vienna,' remarked Doino. 'It seems to me a suitable occasion for a celebration.'

'It will be a long war,' Stetten answered with resignation. 'I don't know whether I shall see the end of it. But in any case I shall never go back to Vienna. I loved that city too much to be able ever to forgive it – just as you will never be able to forgive Communism for its rottenness.'

'Your comparison seems to me unconvincing. A city is not . . .'

'Let's not discuss it, Dion. It's too early in any case to start thinking about going back. I don't like these air-raid warnings. Don't laugh, I mean it seriously. If they're supposed to be practice, they're too late; if they're genuine, it's a bad sign. Somewhere a German aeroplane flies over French soil, and from Strasbourg to Paris a dozen million people are woken from their sleep, driven down underground and robbed of precious hours of rest. Have the responsible authorities absolutely no common sense whatever? Haven't they thought out these problems seriously, years ago?'

'This is the first night. It's probably a test. The people are to be taught to take the warnings seriously.'

'Nonsense,' Stetten replied impatiently. 'They won't learn to do so this way. Rather the contrary.'

'It's all quite unimportant.'

'I grant you that. There are unimportant details which yet forecast the course of events still to come. We must not forget that. The Mayerling scandal made it perfectly obvious to me – and at the time I was a very young man and utterly unembittered – that the House of Hapsburg was doomed.'

'Well, we'll see in the course of the next few days. The war has only been in existence for fourteen hours and forty-eight minutes. We must be prepared to forgive it a certain amount – on account of its youth.'

'Your call-up papers can arrive by the first post today. Are you not nervous at the prospects of barrack life, of non-commissioned officers and so on? And afterwards—'

'Afterwards comes the defeat of the Third Reich – and for the moment that is all I can think about. In barracks I shall, no doubt, think

about the N.C.O's. At the front, what soldier ever sees the object or even the sense of the war?

'You will.'

'I don't know. But now you should go to bed, Professor, because soon our visitors will start arriving. I'm sure today will be as noisy as all the past week has been.'

'Have they all already signed your manifesto, *Against Hitler and his Ally Stalin?*'

'No, many of them are still hesitating. A husband who finds his naked wife in bed with a naked man and is therefore filled with agonising doubts about her possible infidelity – that is a fine illustration of the state of mind of many of my friends. Incidentally, it also describes the reactions of the democratic politicians to Hitler's threats during the past few years.'

'The world is filled with the brayings of *imbéciles*.'

'No. The cuckold I described is not necessarily a fool. He would accept certainty if he had previously been offered another, more consoling certainty. There ought to be a monument in every city inscribed: "To the deceivers, with the gratitude of the deceived." Robespierre presented Paris with a girl of, it is said, doubtful morals, as the Goddess of Reason. The consequences did not serve the cause of reason very well. Every year humanity should be given a God of Falschhood in order that mankind become accustomed to negative certainties. Incidentally, so far this war is a completely negative certainty; we are fighting against something, but we have nothing to fight *for*.'

'For the unification of the globe,' said Stetten. 'That's what we wrote.'

'Yes, and that's what sixty-seven people read.'

'How can you say such a thing, Dion? We already have eighty-one readers. There can be no doubt that the wind is in our sails.'

The wailing siren, announcing the third air-raid warning, interrupted their laughter. They walked over to the window and looked at the clear sky and the little white clouds above the far horizon. They glanced towards the towers of Notre Dame from which the howls of the siren seemed to come. It was almost a surprise to see that the cathedral still stood there motionless. At the moment they both loved the great building. As if to correct both his and Stetten's false ideas, Doino said:

'No, there is something far more important than saving Notre Dame: that is to keep children from being killed or sick or abandoned, and to give them a life in which they need not ever know self-contempt.'

I've hated war ever since I was a boy, and yet I've been forced to long for this one to begin – and that is more humiliating than the spittle of the Gestapo upon one's face.'

The uninterrupted ringing of a bell sounded from the street below. Stetten said:

'That's the gas warning. Perhaps it would be wiser to stay up here. So let's go down to the cellar at once.'

They leaned out of the window. There was no sign of any aeroplane as far as they could see. While going downstairs Stetten whispered:

'We're taking part in an operetta. Operettas are always the prelude to annihilating defeats. Believe an old Viennese!'

Day after day, night after night, the air-raid alarm sounded, making all normal activity impossible. Everybody was ordered to carry his gas-mask at all times, and certainly never to go outdoors without it. They had been distributed to the population by the local authorities, but none had been given to the foreigners resident in France. Nevertheless the rich could easily buy one, but the poor émigrés were told that they would have to make do with a damp cloth held over nose and mouth. However, they were soon to be relieved of this, as of so many other worries. A few days after the outbreak of war notices were posted all over Paris announcing that all foreigners of German or Austrian origin and of less than seventy years of age must report to a certain sports stadium within a short, specified period of time. No distinction was drawn between those men who had renounced their original nationality, or had been deprived of it by the German Government, and those other Germans who remained true to Hitler. Even men who had volunteered weeks or even months ago for the French Army had to report.

'Have you read this?' Stetten asked, pointing at the announcement in a newspaper.

'Yes, early this morning. I went to Werlé at once. He's going to see to it that they don't intern you. I'm waiting for his telephone call, I'm sure he'll be successful. Your police record must contain ample evidence of your consistently anti-fascist attitude, and, besides, in four months' time you'll be seventy.'

'Is that really all you've got to say?' the old man asked. The newspaper was shaking in his hand and his chin trembled. They started by refusing me a visa or a *permis de séjour*, precisely because they knew for a fact that I was an anti-Nazi. And they're putting people like me in camps simply because we're of German or Austrian origin. Don't you

realise what this means? Can't you see what an ominous augury for the future this is? I won't go into a camp! When the Nazis imprisoned me, it was all right; but that I should be deprived of my freedom in the name of liberty and democracy – that I will not tolerate.'

Doino tried in vain to calm him down, or at least to change the subject. At last Werlé arrived, and the news he brought was bad. It was true that it had been decided to make a few exceptions to the general regulation, and the list was actually being drawn up at that moment; but the men who were not to be interned were exclusively active political figures. Stetten was not, of course, included among them. Werlé urged him to obey the instructions so that he might be *en règle*. He would see to it that he was released within a very few days. He went on to say that the measure was after all a sensible one. All dossiers had to be carefully examined, because nothing would have been easier for the Germans than to smuggle spies into France disguised as refugees. War entailed sacrifice on everybody's part; the time for frivolity was over; everything that helped bring victory nearer must be accepted as inevitable.

Doino then said:

'It's more than likely that there are agents of the Gestapo and of other police forces among the refugees. Their task, however, is not military espionage, but to watch politically interesting émigrés. Spies have good passports and are generally disguised as citizens of neutral or of allied nations. So what makes you think that it will be any easier for the police to catch a few spies if they do lock up all the refugees?'

'Excuse me, my dear colleague,' said Werlé impatiently, 'but I cannot permit you to criticise the measures which our government has seen fit to take.'

Stetten walked over to the door.

'I thank you, Monsieur Werlé, for the trouble you have taken on my behalf,' he said icily.

'But please, Stetten, don't be so impatient. I'll go with you myself as far as the stadium gate.'

'Nobody will go with me, because I do not intend to go at all. And since this is the last time that we shall be seeing one another, there is one thing to which I would like to draw your attention. I identify my country with its government and I condemn it accordingly. If you were a true patriot you would be grateful to me for the fact that I regard France as superior to its government. If I criticise the latter it is in order that I need not renounce my love for the former, a love which is now of a more than half a century's duration. Good day to you!'

That evening Werlé telephoned. He was hurt, but his anxiety for his old friend was greater than the slight to his self-esteem. He produced every conceivable reason why Doino must persuade Stetten to give in. Finally he said:

'You, a Pole, a citizen of an allied country, surely you must understand?'

Doino replied:

'It's not a question of my understanding, but of yours. Stetten doesn't refuse to go on personal grounds or because he's afraid of being interned. His personal case seems to him unimportant but, rightly, as typical. He refuses to be an accomplice in an action which he regards as an insult to his judgment. He has never in his life given in on occasions such as this. It is for that very reason that I have respected him for decades now. So how should I persuade him to change his mind?'

It was a frightful night. From time to time the siren would wail, but they did not go down to the cellar. Stetten talked incessantly and in ever more vehement language. Doino began to be frightened on the old man's account. The Professor sat, half-dressed, on his bed; his whole body was trembling; he gesticulated violently with a slipper which he held in one hand; his face was dead white and his eyes sunken.

'Will you stop plaguing me about my dressing-gown!' He was shouting as though he wished to drown the sirens outside. 'Don't you realise that you've always, consistently, been wrong? I've known you for over twenty years, and during all that time whatever you've said has been wrong. The Russian revolution, the revolution of the proletariat in Germany, in China – God knows where else! And then when even you couldn't swallow that tripe any longer, you began yapping about how Russia was our only sure ally. When that poor devil arrived here from Siberia you just left him alone, alone with his truth and his misery, so that the only escape left him was to throw himself under a train. And now, after all that, you say you trust this government here! You dare to tell me, *me*, that I should place myself in the hands of the French police. And what will you do, Faber, when one day this splendid police force hands us over to the Gestapo? As hostages, as security, as . . .'

'Please, Professor, how can you even imagine such a thing?'

'Shut up! I can't stand any more of your watertight Jewish optimism. Just answer me this one question: Is Poland being handed over to the Germans at this moment? Yes or no?'

'The war's only just begun. The French General Staff has certainly got a plan, some large-scale operation which . . .'

'No, really I can't listen to any more of this. You stopped us from leaving the country. You're either blind or you're mad. You . . .'

At about two o'clock Stetten had a heart attack. He lay there gasping, helpless and yet refusing all assistance. He tried to send Doino away.

When at last the doctor arrived he was already better. Dr Bolenski was a Pole, and therefore was not entitled to practise or to write a prescription. He recommended a medicine to strengthen Stetten's heart and said that he would come back again with a French doctor. An electro-cardiograph would probably be necessary. On the stairs he told Doino that it might be nothing at all, or it might be the first sign of something very serious indeed. In any case, there could be no question of moving Stetten to a camp. He would see to it that a medical certificate was provided which would solve this problem for the immediate future.

'Look, it's already broad daylight! I had a wonderful, dreamless sleep. Poor boy, you must be dead tired. Go and get some rest.'

'No, I'm all right. I had a nap sitting in this chair. I've only just woken up. You're feeling better, that's obvious.'

'Give me your hand and tell me that you forgive me. I was cruel and unjust. I spat poison at you which came from my body rather than from my soul. We must do some psycho-physiological research so as to be able better to understand these matters and perhaps to be in control of such situations. I'd always hoped that I'd grow old without becoming spiteful, but . . .'

'There's absolutely nothing spiteful about you. The doctor will soon be here with the certificate. Now go back to sleep for a while.'

Dr Bolenski arrived in the course of the morning wearing the uniform of a Polish officer and accompanied by an elderly French colleague. Dr Meunier had first to recover from the long climb; he sat down on the bed and waited until his breathing was normal again. He was of medium height, delicately built, with a frank, open face, bright, youthful eyes, an ironic mouth and fine, clever hands. He examined the room carefully, had a good look at Doino, and only then turned to his patient. He wished to give him a thorough examination and asked that he be left alone with him. The Polish doctor said good-bye to the three men, explaining that he was leaving the country in a few hours' time in order to make a difficult, roundabout journey back to Poland. Doino waited for over an hour before Meunier came into his room.

'If Bolenski had told me you lived up so many flights, I shouldn't have come. I daren't climb so many stairs these days. And if the news

from Poland hadn't been so bad this morning I shouldn't have come either. It's curious how things hang together. But I'm glad I'm here now. Baron von Stetten is a remarkable man.'

Doino waited for the doctor to tell him the conclusions he had drawn from his examination; the old doctor, however, was in no hurry. While he spoke his clever eyes were constantly on the move, the eyes of an elderly, self-confident diagnostician, with much experience and much success behind him, the eyes of a man who knows that he sees more than other men, and that he grasps far more than he sees. But pride was an emotion which he no longer felt; and he was aware of this change, though others might not be. For some years now he had lived in the hourly expectation of sudden death. This knowledge did not particularly frighten him, but his whole life was passed beneath the shadow of that threat, and it had already destroyed his capacity for enjoyment. 'The value of knowledge is purely relative.' This simple fact, which he now recognised, ruled his life, this and the certainty that after it was all over his whole existence would, in retrospect, have been nothing but a *rigolade*, a joke with a bad ending. Meunier was surrounded by a large family whose attachment to himself was constantly manifested in all possible ways. He was a famous doctor and highly esteemed. Once – he had been awakened shortly after falling asleep by a pain in his left arm – he had drawn up a list of names of the people who were closest to him, the people to whom he believed himself bound by strong ties of intimacy. It was an astonishingly long list. Beneath it he wrote: 'Encompassed by so much love I shall yet die as lonely as any tramp picked up from the street and taken to the Hôtel-Dieu.'

'Now I imagine you'd like to know about the baron's condition. Well, he's an old man and he might easily have died last night. Had you gone to Canada with him his health would now be very much better. He's told me your reasons for not doing so, and, I may say, I respect you for them. In any case, no matter where Monsieur Stetten might be he would always be in danger, for this reason: he has a curious capacity for being intensely unhappy, and such intensity is usually limited to the very young. For old people it is extremely bad. What is best for them is a certain egoism, a certain indifference towards the sufferings of others. We old people have our work cut out for us looking after ourselves if we wish to go on living; we have no excess strength to give to other men.'

'Professor Stetten is not, as you suggest, particularly egotistical. He suffers from the stupidity and the frightfulness of the age. The fact that he's supposed now to go to a camp . . .'

'He won't be going to any camp,' Meunier interrupted. 'I'll see to it that he's left entirely in peace. But that is no longer the problem. Monsieur Stetten refuses to obey the instructions that have been issued, and at the same time he refuses to be spared the necessity of disobeying. He will not accept a medical certificate.'

'Well, in that case . . .' Doino began.

'Don't worry. I'll see that it's all arranged. But meanwhile your elderly friend must be made to feel that he is still fighting for his beliefs. You think that that might be bad for his heart? Would resignation and surrender be any better?'

'Forgive me, I'm afraid I don't quite understand. What Stetten needs is calm, tranquillity. Luckily you can give him that, so . . .'

Again Meunier interrupted with an impatient gesture of his hand. After a moment or two he said:

'When a man is young he can express himself in action. At your friend's age, what counts is no longer action but attitude. Whether it be clever or purposeful is irrelevant, what matters is that it be fine and beautiful. That is the only sort of beauty to which old age can still hope to attain.'

'And for me,' Doino answered with vehemence, 'for me all that matters is that Stetten should go on living for a long time. He has maintained one fine attitude for seventy years. Furthermore, as a Frenchman, you . . .'

'I should worry about the attitude of my compatriots which displeases you? Is that what you were going to say?'

'Not quite. In bad periods men and peoples die because of what is best in them. A mature nation, which cannot forget the unhealed wounds of its own past victories, hates and even despises war. If your country is to go down because of that attitude, then I should prefer to die with it rather than to live with its conquerors. Meanwhile it is intolerable to watch all that is worst in this country gaining control and exaggerating the inevitable idiocy of warfare. It is intolerable that a man such as Stetten should be treated as an enemy, while Hitler's French supporters and agents – of whom there are far too many – are ignored and even left in positions of responsibility. Don't worry about our attitude, attend to that of your fellow-countrymen!'

'What you've just said is not too badly expressed, but is it, I wonder, true? Why should we die because of what is best in us? On the contrary, why should it not be just those qualities which will save us?'

Doino was in no mood for arguing, not just how at any rate. All he wished to do was to help Stetten. Nevertheless he said:

'As usual any generalisation about a nation is only partly true; it's a

caricature in both the negative and the positive sense. The problem basically is one of emphasis. All the adjectives are applicable to all the nations; the national virtues and vices vary, of course, but the balance between them is almost everywhere the same. So the question becomes this: what significance do they assume in any particular historic frame of reference? It may be that the moment has arrived in which the great French virtues can only accentuate the effect of the French vices *unless* the critical spirit gains the upper hand. You must not forget that I am a Jew. For thousands of years my people have honoured their prophets, those passionate men who never ceased to show us our vices no matter how painful that duty might be. The eulogists and chauvinists we have forgotten. And now I think it's time we got back to the subject of your patient.'

'Don't worry. I'll arrange that he go to a first-class pension just outside Paris. If he has financial worries, I shall be delighted to take care of all that. But tell me this: you believe then in the salutary effects of disagreeable truths? Let us assume that you knew you were finished, that death might overtake you at any moment – would you tell the people who loved you or would you hide it from them?'

'The condition of France is certainly not as serious as that. Hitler will be defeated, finally.'

'What do you mean, France?' Meunier was momentarily nonplussed. 'Oh, I see. But you haven't answered my question. Would you keep the secret to yourself?'

'Were I in the position of the man you describe, I might perhaps try to hide the truth from myself – the truth that the reason the others had not immediately guessed my secret was that they had no desire to do so.'

Meunier gazed at Doino for a long time as though suddenly realising that this stranger had a quite different face from what he had thought. Then he said:

'What you've just said is atrocious. Have you then suffered so much?'

'No. For years my friends and I have tried to warn our contemporaries – our lack of success is without parallel. The French, undoubtedly the cleverest nation in the world, have been warned day in and day out. No, there are no secrets save for those who will not see until it is almost too late. Who will take Stetten to the pension? Is he well enough yet to be moved?'

'First let us agree to this: you will allow the old gentleman to go on believing that he is a rebel and you will not tell him that I have intervened with the authorities. Do not deprive him of his right to make a gesture, I beg you.'

'Doctor, I don't like this sort of business, but if you insist . . .

'I do insist. If I were in his position I should want to be treated in much the same way.'

Stetten's condition improved. His language and his gestures remained violent, however, particularly when he heard from Relly and Thea of the way their husbands were being treated. Together with thousands of other refugees, Edi and Josmar had been herded into the sports stadium where no serious preparations had been made to feed them or to shelter them from the rain and the cold. The military rigidity of the measures ordered against the refugees was complemented by the gross inefficiency with which they were carried out. 'Hapsburg absolutism was tempered by negligence. Here inefficiency simply serves to make despotism intolerably more disagreeable,' Stetten remarked bitterly. Doino kept all visitors away from the professor and did his best to distract his mind from current events. But the old man insisted on reading the papers and listening to the radio. He must be directly involved in everything.

'Be careful not to get mixed up in metaphysical nonsense!' he told Djoura, who had come to say good-bye before returning to Yugoslavia. 'I don't like the way you use the adjective "absurd" so frequently. Human existence would appear as absurd to a god as the life of a fly does to us. But it is we who thought up this god and nobody thought us up. The fact that our actions and denials justify every sort of pessimism is an incontestable truth but a dull and trite one; wrapping it up in poetic and metaphysical language doesn't make it any more profound. On the other hand, we also justify every sort of optimism; in all chaotic nature we alone manage to do more than just react to external stimuli, because we give everything a meaning. Man's beginning and end may indeed strike our sense of comedy as utterly ridiculous; nevertheless, he is the one and only phenomenon in the universe which is not absurd. He who only knows man as he is and ignores what he might be, does not know him. Am I not quoting you there, Dion?' Stetten asked with a smile.

Then, turning back to Djoura, he went on:

'You see, man is not as limited as those windbags would have us believe. So long as Faber lives I shall never really have ceased to exist. And yet during these past few days I've behaved so badly towards him that one might think I wanted him to go into mourning for me now.'

Djoura said:

'You must be curious to see how the war's going to end. Don't die before then. The baroness writes me that she would be very pleased to have you to stay with her in her house in Dalmatia. We'll all come there, as the good soldier Schweik says, "at six o'clock in the evening after the end of the World War". Marie-Thérèse writes that she'd prefer it if you arrived in the early afternoon rather than just before luncheon, because she doesn't want your first meal together to be something not properly prepared. Fresh meat, she writes, is not always easily obtainable down there. She expects you, Professor, to learn how to play the ocarina during the course of this war, and she asks that you bring your instrument with you. As for you, Doino, I was to tell you that it's absolutely essential you learn how to play bridge so that you're available if she should need a fourth. She knows that the men in the trenches have really nothing to do except play cards, so she says you'll certainly have ample opportunity to become a first-class bridge player.'

Djoura took her letter from his pocket. The baroness gave further, detailed instructions. She had included photographs of her house, a large, three-storied manor with extensive wings stretching out to either side. The approach was between a double rank of cyprus trees. There was a broad terrace with a pergola, a dock, a boathouse and a bathing hut.

'Our dear friend would never forgive you if you didn't come.'

The sirens began to wail and there was no sense in trying to shout them down. The photographs from Dalmatia made each of them thoughtful, though for different reasons. The war here was still as unreal as these idiotic air-raid warnings; yet at this moment they were all three filled with a longing for true peace. The very thought of it shook them with a gentle violence.

'Tell *chère* Marie-Thérèse that Dion will arrive at approximately four o'clock after the war. He will know how to play the ocarina and will be able to fill my place in all other ways. Good luck to you, Djoura, and don't forget that humanity is not absurd; though man's deeds may sometimes be, his truth never is.'

'I shan't forget – though I'll doubtless often have reason to believe you wrong. Man's deeds we know; as for himself, we know him scarcely better than he knows himself. And so far as his truth goes, well, you'll tell us about that after the war, some fine night down in Dalmatia.'

Two days later, when Doino returned from the printer's where he had been correcting the proofs of his *Manifesto*, he found a sealed

envelope on his table addressed *Dion*. He hurried anxiously into the next room, but Stetten was not there. He read:

Dion,

Albert G. must leave the country. I shall cross the frontier with him. It may take us a few days to get there. I shall write to you from Belgium or Norway, if we succeed in reaching either country. It's first of all a question of helping Albert, but secondly of telling the truth, of being enabled to criticise one's own side. Otherwise this will be another useless war, a further instalment of nationalistic filth.

You know how much you mean to me. I am frightened for you. I lack the courage to say good-bye. I even lack the physical strength.

Forgive your old

Erich Stetten

The concierge said that the two men had left the house at about ten o'clock that morning. So they had already been gone for three hours. Doino went to the Gare du Nord, though he knew this was a useless action. He studied the timetables and hurried through the corridors of the trains that were about to leave.

He telephoned Dr Meunier and explained to him what had happened, though he avoided saying anything compromising. The doctor reassured him. Even if the professor were to be picked up by a police patrol no harm would come to him. At most he would be kept under arrest for a few hours until a message arrived from Paris saying that he was *en règle*. It was to be hoped that the warm weather would go on and that the old gentleman would guard against the cold and damp of the nights and would not over-exert himself. If he were careful there was no reason why this escapade should have any ill effect on his health. But of course it was always a gamble.

Doino went home. He waited. In the evening he asked Relly to come around. In her opinion there was no voice more pure than Stetten's, and she was glad that that voice was going to make itself heard abroad.

'The voice of a dying man,' interjected Doino.

'Your voice certainly won't be heard,' Relly answered with sudden violence. 'There you are, already prepared to conceal the truth for the sake of a cause once again. Since Vasso's death you've grown more and more like Stetten, but that's one thing that makes you utterly unlike him – the fact that you can accept injustice if its exposure would damage your cause. You're still protected by your dialectic conscience, you're still blind.'

Doino nodded. She waited in vain for his reply. Then she began once again to pile reproaches on him. Her bitterness knew no bounds.

'And the last thing I've got to tell you is this: it was pure cowardice on your part that made you volunteer for the army. To become a recruit, a future nameless corpse – that's the end you've been looking for ever since Vasso died. And now at last you're on the right road to it, the final flight. Our sufferings are a matter of indifference to you, even Stetten's sufferings don't move you. You and you alone will be to blame if anything should happen to him.'

'Edi has volunteered, and Josmar, and many others as well – do they all want to be the nameless corpses too?'

She got up and ran to the door. Her eyes were filled with tears. It was all so futile; there was no sense in talking to this man, no sense in waiting for Stetten. Every day she stood, among many hundred other women, outside the gates of the stadium in the hope that she might catch a glimpse of Edi. So far she had not succeeded in doing so. Thus did she spend her days, neglecting her child to do so. Soon she would be completely penniless. A long-expected draft from Edi's uncle in London had not arrived. The grocers would give no more credit to the wife of an interned enemy alien. All the children at Paul's school had gas-masks except only he. Because he had wished to fight for France, Edi had turned down all offers from America. And now it appeared that, because of some project which he had offered to the War Ministry, he was regarded with particular suspicion. It seemed that his was a specially serious case, and that he was to be interned in a camp which was even more strictly administered.

And there was Doino, the man who had almost wrecked her life because his whole existence had been dedicated to a great cause. There he sat, and all he could think to do was to wait for a piece of paper which would turn him, at the age of thirty-seven, into a little infantryman, and would enable him thus to die for France. And for that reason alone he kept quiet about everything and let his oldest friend run into danger – no, it was unimaginable! She turned back from the door and walked across to him. She slapped his face hard. And now at last she was able to cry. He stood up and took her in his arms. He had no words with which to console her, for he was entirely preoccupied with thoughts of Stetten. Where would the professor sleep tonight? The cold would be dangerous for him. If only the old man's heart could pull him through tonight!

'What have I done, Doino? What have I done?' Relly repeated, sobbing. He stroked her hair in an attempt to calm her.

'Nothing, Relly, nothing at all. We've all been too unhappy too long.'

'Why do we suffer like this? For whom?'

'For no one and for nothing. If we win this time, your son Pauli will once again find something worth fighting for. We can only fight *against*. We're back in the first phase, the negation of a negation. It's nothing new, except that we are perhaps the first generation which has to live without illusions.'

'Live? Do you call this living?'

'Yes, Relly, I do. Nobody is always unhappy, nobody lives only in the shadows. Even in the concentration camp we managed to laugh occasionally; even in the midst of a cataclysm people are hungry and in love and create children. And when the surrounding darkness is blackest, you'll find that each human body sheds its own light. The sensation of unhappiness is a luxury of normal, happy life. Our existence cannot be qualified in those terms. In the next few years it will be a question of naked life itself; life will be both our objective and our weapon.'

She freed herself from his arms and gazed at him as though she were seeing him for the first time. She knew his face better than her own, better perhaps even than that of her child – she had known it now for decades. It had grown thinner, older, even more austere, yet it was the same face which she had seen register joy, enchantment, sensuality, even kindness. But now it matched his phrase – the most atrocious, it seemed to her, that she had ever heard – 'life will be a weapon'. She turned away and ran from the room. She was desperately, urgently anxious to see her son.

Two days later, early in the morning, Albert arrived. He had had to leave Stetten in a house on the road outside Arras. The professor had insisted that he go to find Doino at once. In view of the circumstances, telephoning was out of the question. The old man had had a severe heart attack, had collapsed on the threshold of that house, and had fallen down several stairs. Doino was to come without delay. The professor was awaiting him; it was only a matter of hours before the inevitable end.

Meunier was already awake. Doino had only said a few words before he declared that there was no time to lose. In twenty minutes he would be ready to leave, and the chauffeur would have the car outside the door. Doino mentioned Albert, who was in the waiting-room. He must be found a safe hiding-place.

'You guarantee that this man is neither a Gestapo nor a G.P.U. agent, that the accusations made against him are false, put about by his former comrades?'

Doino replied:

'I guarantee that Albert Gräfe is an outstandingly upright and decent man. Either one of us might well wish that we possessed his qualities.'

'You think very highly of him.'

'So did Stetten. And he was prepared to act accordingly.'

'True. And that's enough for me,' said Meunier.

He telephoned his nursing-home to send an ambulance for Albert. He gave him two pills to swallow which, he said, would have a disagreeable effect but would do him no real harm.

'Perhaps you think that I would have done better to keep him here. But neither my wife nor my daughter would understand. It would take me a long time to explain it all to them. Alain, my son, is at the front. There would have been no need to explain to him.'

Not until they were in the car did Meunier ask why Stetten had gone off like this, without even saying good-bye, as though he were running from a burning building.

'Did he really do it on account of that poor devil?'

'Yes,' replied Doino. 'Of all the men of the revolutionary movement whom Stetten met, that working man impressed him the most.'

'We all have an occasional feeling of guilt concerning the people,' Meunier remarked, 'but it is only sporadically in evidence. It's easily forgotten, too.'

'Stetten has never had such a feeling. Which is another reason why he has never taken psychoanalysis seriously. "Spectacles for the blind" he called it once. Gräfe had a perfectly good Norwegian passport and could have left at any time, but he chose to remain here. He believed it when they said that his dossier would be carefully re-examined. Apart from that, he also hoped that despite his poor health he would be able to fight in some special unit. They put him off from day to day: the whole misunderstanding had already been cleared up, they said, it was all a preposterous mistake, he was obviously the victim of an amateurish campaign of lies which was as naïve as it was infamous. And then three days ago he was arrested, handcuffed, and taken off. Only after a lengthy interrogation were the handcuffs removed. He felt, he said, that he was caught up in the machine again. During an air-raid alert he and the other prisoners at the police station were taken down into a coal-cellar. He managed to escape from there and made his way to Stetten, who doubtless felt at once that he was again confronted with a

case of "symbolic injustice" as he calls it. When I was a child the rabbis taught me that humanity could not exist for a single day without drowning in its own injustice, were it not for the thirty and six just men – men who are marked by no office or honour, who are unrecognisable, who guard their secret, who are perhaps themselves unaware of their distinction. But it is they who, generation after generation, justify our existence and who save the world anew with each new day.'

'Do you believe that Stetten might be one of those six and thirty?' Meunier asked.

'No, he is probably not a *Lamed-waf*,' Doino replied with a smile. It pleased him that the sceptical Frenchman should accept rabbinical wisdom, even if he only did so metaphorically. 'No. But on the other hand there may be, in each generation, six and thirty cases of symbolic injustice, each of which would be amply sufficient cause for the damnation of the whole world. If no man should protest against these injustices – well, in that case perhaps the burden would be too great for the thirty and six just men to bear. . . . You must help Stetten, doctor, we must not lose him!'

'I should like you to look after my son, later, when this is all over,' Meunier said. 'By that time you will be your teacher's successor.'

'There is no succession. Were there such a thing, I should not accept it.'

'I don't believe that you will be given any choice. You must tell me more about the thirty and six just men. You are not a believer and neither am I, though only, I may say, since a few years ago. But – lately I find that I wake up every morning at about three o'clock. Sometimes I read, but more often I just lie in the dark. Perhaps it would be good at these times to meditate on those unrecognised just men; it is a fairy tale which, for unbelieving adults, might well take the place of religion. We have still a good hour's run to Arras. Tell me more.'

Stetten managed, with difficulty, to raise himself into a more upright position. He wanted his head to be higher on the pillows so that he could see Doino the moment he came through the door which was opposite the foot of the bed. Eventually he must come.

On his right was the window. If his head were a little higher he could also look out and see the grey sky, the field of stubble, and behind it the brickworks with the red chimney. To his left, above the washstand, there hung a looking-glass in a silver-painted frame. The handsomest thing in the room was the beams which supported the ceiling. They were stained brown and formed a big cross.

There were footsteps on the stairs, but they were certainly not Doino's. It was Monsieur Vooring, the owner of the little house. Undoubtedly he wished to produce further arguments in favour of his world-shaking mushroom theory. Stetten asked:

'What time is the next train from Paris?'

'It should be here in an hour and a half. But of course it may be late. We mustn't forget there's a war on. Would you like me to get you something to drink?'

'No, no, stay here. Or perhaps you're busy – with the mushrooms?'

'I am, as a matter of fact,' the man replied. 'It's this new type. I've got to keep an eye on them all day today. You see, the temperature has to be adjusted every ten minutes. But just you wait! Today it's going to work out, my experiment. I can't help thinking what a pity it is that half our club members won't be there when I come to announce my triumph. War is a terrible thing.'

When he came back he brought with him a scroll of honour, which he had won at some time during the quarter-century he had devoted to mushrooms. He read it aloud to Stetten, proudly emphasising each word. Listening to him was tiring for the sick man. Then he produced statistical diagrams which he explained at length.

'I've no doubt that within a few days I'll succeed in convincing you. I could convince everyone, but I'll tell you what's wrong with the world: no one ever listens. Everyone talks just so as not to have to listen. You, even though you're a foreigner, you understand me because you're an intelligent man. And just you wait and see, you'll be eternally grateful to me.'

Stetten was alone once more. He had slipped down in the bed again. He wished to raise his head, but the effort required was too great. Then came that fearful sensation, an agony that resembled a prolonged terror caused by a nameless and ever-growing threat. This must be what dying is like, the sick man told himself when it was past. He had never in his life before experienced so humiliating a sensation. He would have liked to describe it to Doino. If only he would come! If he were here this terror would no longer overwhelm him; when he felt it rising he would grip Doino's hand, both his hands, and hold them as tightly as his strength allowed. In any case, it was better now. Only these shadows that came between him and the light were annoying. He reached under the pillow for his spectacles. He touched them and then he lost them again. There was something else there. It was the ocarina. He placed it on the blanket before him, and it looked to him as though it were broken in two.

Monsieur Vooring was back. He stood at the foot of the bed so that Stetten could no longer see the door. He was talking, but Stetten had difficulty in understanding what he said. Stetten wished to say: 'I want to understand,' and he began, '*Voglio comprendere . . .*' but that was not French. He must speak French, and already that atrocious sensation was beginning again, a vast pair of pliers was biting into his chest. He stretched out his hand and gripped the ocarina which he held out towards the man, towards the door . . . in a moment he'd be able to breathe again, in just a moment. . . .

It was a very small house, the outside painted a hideous shade of brown. Doino recognised it from Albert's description when they were still a long way off. As the car drew up a man ran out of the front door.

'If you've come for the old gentleman you're too late. I'm not sure but I think you're too late; you see, I've never seen anybody die before. It's curious, isn't it? Here I am, fifty-one years old, and I've never seen anybody die before.'

Doino ran up the stairs. The door was open. Meunier pushed past him and hurried over to the bed. He made a sign with his hand. Doino took the cloth and bound up the dead man's chin. He ran his hand over the dead man's eyes but they would not close, so that he had to repeat the gesture twice. Then he took the ocarina from Stetten's hand.

Meunier sat down on the bed and gazed out of the window. After a little while he asked:

'Did the ocarina have any significance?'

Doino wanted to answer but it was too difficult to speak. The doctor looked at him and then handed him the block of paper, which he used for his prescriptions, and a pen. Doino wrote:

'He chose a plot in the Père Lachaise cemetery.'

There were many formalities to be completed both in Arras and in Paris. Meunier took care of everything. In the afternoon he came back with a colleague who countersigned the death certificate. It was arranged that the body would be transported to Paris on the following day.

That evening Monsieur Vooring came up. He could not light the lamps in his house since he had not yet bought any black-out curtains, and the authorities were very strict hereabouts. This made no difference to him, since he always went to bed early and therefore didn't need any light. The poor old gentleman would never have had this accident if the steps had been properly lit, although that wasn't the real cause of the misfortune. He said:

'It will no doubt surprise you when I say that I too have suffered a grievous loss. You see I am convinced that the gentleman would have become an adherent of my theory if he had not happened to die. Because I was with him almost all the time, I scarcely ever left him alone, and he was undoubtedly interested in my theory. There can be no two opinions about that. Listen, I want you to understand. . . .'

In great detail he expounded his 'theory'. Mushrooms are a form of nourishment which provides almost everything that the human frame requires, and which can, therefore, replace almost all other food. They are simple to grow and any poor man can raise them in his cellar; furthermore, if he were to follow the Vooring method, he would produce more than are necessary for his family's sustenance. Thus if all the men on earth were to cultivate mushrooms they would be freed of all material anxiety, they would be independent, and, since each man would produce his own nourishment, they would be absolutely free. Envy, jealousy, and war would soon all be forgotten. And apart from this, meat makes men bad-tempered, whereas mushrooms, on the other hand, have a spiritually calming effect. Sickiness, too, would disappear, since it is largely caused by eating the wrong sorts of food.

'I know you'll object that one can't eat the same food every day because it becomes nauseating in the long run. But wait a minute! I've thought about that too . . .'

Finally he reached the end of his dissertation.

'My family over there - I should tell you that I'm a Belgian citizen - has failed so far to understand what I'm getting at. But your poor friend was interested in my theory, right up to the very end he was. It can't be pure coincidence that brought him to my house. Around these parts whenever anybody is looking for a room for the night my neighbours always send him here. They may laugh about my mushrooms, but they know that I never turn anyone away.'

At last Doino was alone. He was tired. Since eleven that morning he had been standing, motionless, by the window, yet even now he had no wish to sit down. This was not on account of the dead man - he was one of those men of a generation for whom all ceremonial and all symbolic gestures had long lost their value. Such men scarcely knew the meaning even of shame any more. Yet though they would speak of their desires and disappointments in straightforward, matter-of-fact terms, it embarrassed them when they had to express their sufferings. And that, precisely because they had discarded traditional forms as a man might throw away a worn-out fancy dress.

Faber had met death early, when he was a small child. The war had

passed through the little town in which he lived. One rainy afternoon of autumn the fighting for the bridgehead had begun and the firing did not end until ten o'clock next morning. Then the streets were filled with people, all hurrying to the river's bank. There lay the dead, each where he had fallen. Near the blown bridge was the corpse of a young soldier. He looked as though he might have fallen asleep and been weeping in his dreams. There was no sign of a wound or of blood. There were people standing around him and an old peasant woman was crying. When Doino passed that way again, a few minutes later, he saw that the boy's shoes had disappeared, together with the thin and wretched wallet which had been sticking out of his tunic pocket. And then Doino had wept, not in mourning for the young soldier, but out of rage against the living and out of a deep shame.

Soon the epidemics began, typhus and smallpox. He watched his parents die, his mother first and a few hours later his father. His sister lay on the ground between the two corpses, and screamed:

'Don't go away! Don't leave us! We're your children, don't leave us all alone!'

They were buried early next day, and the boy had had to read the funeral orations, first at his father's grave and then at that of his mother. 'May His name be exalted, may it be sanctified . . .' The letters swam before his eyes. The old teacher with the white beard slowly recited the prayer which Doino repeated after him. He was afraid lest he collapse until he saw the elder-tree on the far side of the grave. He kept his eyes fixed on that tree and so he was able to go on until the end.

That winter many died. It was usually late at night when the lamentations in the houses began; in the morning the corpses were taken away and the sounds of weeping would decrease beneath the tinkling of the mourning-bells and the voices crying in Hebrew over and over again: 'Good deeds are a salvation from death.'

In the cemetery they married the two poor people. He was a beggar, lame and half blind, she a grey-haired orphan. The people awaited that a miracle result from this wedding. It did not take place for several weeks, when spring began. Gradually the epidemics died down.

And then the fighting for the bridgehead began again. The houses were set on fire by the shells. The people sought refuge in the cemetery. There, too, shells fell and a girl was killed, and a young woman with a baby in her arms. Tombstones were smashed and the corpses of the dead blown from their graves.

Soon after this Doino and his sister left the little town. His childhood was quickly past. He often remembered the young soldier and thought

of his bare feet. He recalled, too, the wounded horses which had passed through the town after the battles were over, and in particular a grey mare whose eyes had been shot away. He had wept because of that horse the way dead men would cry for themselves if they could experience their own death. It was then that he had promised himself never to forget, never to forget anything.

Later, it was a few weeks after the declaration of the Republic in Vienna, he had taken part in a spontaneous demonstration. They had carried banners on which was written, in clumsy lettering: *Long Live the German-Austrian Soviet Republic*. They marched through side-streets towards the parliament building. They were stopped and shot at. A man was wounded in the hand and screamed. They took refuge in a gateway. Another man, a very tall fellow with only one arm and still wearing his army trousers but no coat, had hiccups. A bearded man said, with disgust: 'It's a disgrace to come to a demonstration drunk. It's an insult to the revolution!' The other replied, with difficulty: 'I'm not drunk. I don't understand what . . .' Then he collapsed. The bearded man leaned down towards him and whispered: 'Forgive me, comrade, I did not mean to be unjust.' Then they uncovered the wound, which was scarcely bleeding. They carried the dead man through the streets. Someone began the mourning song: 'Immortal victims, you are fallen . . .' But now there were not enough of them and only two who knew the words of the song. They were not sure where they should take the corpse. Finally they left it at the mortuary of the General Hospital. Then they separated.

It was still morning and Doino was only a few minutes late for the lecture. The hall was over-full. Stetten was in an excellent mood, and was about to ridicule a Catholic historian who, in his latest work, had glorified the Middle Ages as 'the only true flourishing of Western civilisation'. Doino had listened with rapt attention, as though there were somehow a connection between the words of the clever professor on the platform and the death of the one-armed man whose body he had helped deposit in the mortuary.

It was twenty years and seven months now since that morning. He was standing by the clever professor's deathbed, in a house on *Route Nationale No. 341*, at no great distance from Arras. The corpse meant nothing to him; what might happen to it was unimportant. Nor did it matter what had happened to Vasso's corpse, or to that of the one-armed man, or of the young soldier long ago. Doino could have walked through the door and out of the house, for Stetten existed still within him, as did Vasso. Nobody who lives lives only his own life. It

was not the gods that bestowed immortality on man. So long as one human being continued to exist on earth, humanity was immortal.

He let himself slide down on to the floor and leaned his back against the wall. He pulled his knees up and closed his eyes. He saw pictures from the past, in each of which was the teacher whom he had loved. No thought now lay between him and his grief, and his eyes filled with tears, but he did not cry. With both hands he grasped the ocarina, as if otherwise he might let it fall.

The sun was shining but it was cool in the shade of the trees. He could see the clearing; it was filled with sunshine, and he could hear someone calling him there, but though he stood on tiptoe he could not catch sight of the person. He left the path and went towards the voice, yet he was getting no closer to the clearing. Then he looked down and realised that he had not left the path at all. Again he walked away from it and began to run. The voice was quite loud now. Yet when he stopped running he saw that he was still on the path.

Then he was standing outside the cottage by the railway crossing. There was grass growing between the tracks and the guard kept repeating:

'Yes, it's because of the accident. Ever since the accident happened there's been nothing to do but wait. Usually I cut the weeds up real small, because since the accident that's the only way to do it. Don't say anything, because I don't fancy being interrupted, and besides there's no sense in it. I daresay you have been cold since the accident happened, but not a word. I understand.'

Then he was walking along a path again, and now he could clearly hear the whistle of the engine. So there was a train after all. And this path undoubtedly led to the station. He must hurry. He must run, run. There was no time for him to answer, and in any case he could not be sure that it was he who was being called. Nobody knew him in these parts.

He awoke, cold and stiff. It was just three o'clock. While looking for the blanket that Monsieur Vooring had left him he tried to recall his dream. Its meaning was easy to unravel, and like all symbolism it was rather primitive and not very clever. He might leave the path, but the path would not leave him – that was one way of putting it. His search for the railway station and the possibility that he would never find it, that was surely a stale parable. Was that the whole dream? He remembered the tracks and the weeds, but nothing more.

He wrapped himself up in the blanket and sat down beside the washbasin, so that the bed was between him and the window. He soon

dozed off again. While he slept unhappiness mastered him. The consolation of grief was a refuge no longer. There were no words left. There was only an emotion, infinite and mute.

There were four of them around the open grave. On one side stood Doino and Werlé; on the other, by Grunder's tombstone, Relly and Gaby.

One of the grave-diggers said:

'Might as well shove the earth in at once. Bit of luck there being no priest and no speeches!'

Werlé cleared his throat and then turned to Doino:

'To tell the truth I have prepared a few words. I felt that our poor great friend should not leave us like this. But there are so few of us. . . .'

From the inside pocket of his overcoat he drew out several closely-written pages. Doino nodded. Werlé hesitated, then smoothed out his papers, put on his spectacles, and began to read in a soft though audible voice. The noise of the falling earth annoyed him, but the grave-diggers paid no attention to the sharp looks he cast their way.

The sirens began to wail and the custodian of the cemetery insisted that they all go to the shelter at once. This was no great distance away, a large cellar but almost pitch dark. Gaby stood beside Werlé and shone her torch on his manuscript so that he could continue to read his speech. An old woman with two very small children was standing nearby. She listened attentively to Werlé's words, and from time to time she would nod in agreement.

It was a long oration, well composed and intelligent. At the end Werlé acknowledged his guilt in not having done more for his friend. This sounded sincere and moved them all. Gaby had tears in her eyes.

The two women went home with Doino. They sorted out and packed up Stetten's possessions, which were then taken to Meunier, who had agreed to look after them until the war was over.

Gaby spent whole days with Doino. She found his continual silence hard to bear, yet she did so bravely. She would not have seen Doino again had Relly not informed her of Stetten's death. Months ago she had become reconciled to the fact that she could expect nothing more from him, that he would never now belong to her. This knowledge was still painful, but she derived a certain consolation from the fact that their relationship had always been basically decent and honest. If there had been deception it had been simply deliberate self-deception. The Abbé Perret had explained it all to her: the unhappiest men of our age are those whose real vocation is to be monks or even saints, but who

have become lost in the labyrinth of godlessness. They are simultaneously infinitely close to, and infinitely far from, grace. They do not live in its light, they freeze in its shadow. The most frightful blasphemies of those men are in reality only the violent expression of their hopeless longing for God.

Thus Gaby, thanks to the assistance of the priest, had learned to live without Doino. She saw less of her family these days; the world of the Le Roys, which she had defended so tenaciously against the attacks of the two friends, now appeared to her in a new light. With the outbreak of war she had volunteered to serve with the Red Cross; she was to drive an ambulance. Now she was waiting for them to send for her.

One day she brought Monsignor Graber with her. The prelate had heard from the Abbé Perret of Stetten's death and had expressed a desire to meet Faber.

'I am on my way to Rome. I left Germany two months ago. Perhaps you have heard what happened to me,' he said to Doino. 'Dachau, Buchenwald, then Dachau again – seventeen months in all, including the time I spent in the prison hospital. They maltreated me to begin with.' He pointed to his crutches.

Doino nodded. Robust though he was, the prelate still bore the marks of his imprisonment.

'An important experience,' the prelate continued. 'It is good to learn in this way, too, how hopeless is the damnation of the creature who has no faith when confronted by the devil.'

'During the age of faith, in mediæval times, there were comparable atrocities, sometimes even worse,' said Doino. 'Belief has always demanded more victims than disbelief. The Gestapo and the G.P.U. are institutions of belief.'

'A belief without God or Church,' interrupted the prelate. His face was intense.

'Without your God and your Church, Monsignor. You should be careful not to underestimate God. He can assume many names, many uniforms and many churches.'

'You speak like Stetten, and his age has long been over. The blasphemous witticisms of the nineteenth century are the most dated of all. But you, Herr Faber, you belong to a younger generation. You can still learn.'

Gaby was trying hard to follow their conversation. Her German had improved. The priest had a harsh, deep voice; his enunciation was exceptionally clear, each word being well separated from the last,

each sentence complete in itself. Thus she was able to understand almost all his monologue. Doino did not reply. This disappointed her.

'Unfortunately I have come too late. I should have liked to talk to Baron von Stetten once again. I have thought about him frequently. I was wrong once and I wish I had been able to tell him so and to express my regrets. He was right: the wounded rebel, Franz Unterberger, should never have been executed. I only understood this when I was in the camp. That is what I wished to tell Stetten. Instead, I must confess it to you.'

'I am no father confessor,' replied Doino. 'I give no absolution. That night, when Stetten warned you against injustice and begged you to save Franz Unterberger, that night you crossed a demarcation line, a river of blood. I do not know whether it is possible to cross back again. Perhaps you really did learn something in Dachau. In my eyes all people are damned who have to go to Dachau before they can understand what it means. I give no absolution.'

'Stetten would have spoken differently,' said the prelate. He reached for his crutches and rose awkwardly to his feet.

'Perhaps. He enjoyed sarcasm but it hurt him to inflict pain on anyone.'

'You are a harder man,' said Gruber, his hand on the door-handle.

'Yes. But not so hard as you, Monsignor.'

'That may be so. But you are alone, utterly alone. I, on the other hand, am protected and sheltered – not only from your hardness, but also from my own.'

One Sunday morning – it was already October – Pierre Giraud arrived. He and Doino had frequently met during the period when they were both members of an international group in control of various Party organisations. Since those days Giraud had been relieved of all his functions, but he had not yet left the Party. He was working once again in the automobile factory, earning good money, enough to support his two children who were with his wife. He lived alone and seemed always contented. He loved women and they loved him. He took great pleasure in his food, was himself an excellent cook, enjoyed drinking and never got drunk. In order to be happy, all he had to do was to remember his unhappy childhood in a village of Lorraine. 'The beginning,' he would say, 'was so bad that everything that's happened since was bound to be an improvement.'

He was thirty-four years old but looked younger, a tall and powerfully built man. It was pleasant to remember his laughing, sparkling eyes.

'There's no question of you not accepting,' he said. 'I've already prepared the hors d'œuvres and the dessert. And you know the sort of steak you can expect from me. My friend and her sister are coming, and after lunch we'll pack them off to a cinema for the afternoon. The comrades are due to arrive at about three. Now that Stalin and Hitler have carved up Poland between them and the Central Committee of the French Party has obediently disavowed its own actions and has proclaimed that voting for the war credits was a grave mistake, now at last it must be possible to knock some of the nonsense out of their heads. You'll talk to them about the general situation and afterwards we'll have a discussion. Something might come of it.'

'Why do you need me there? You can say it all yourself.'

'We need you because you can also see the whole set-up from the point of view of the foreign comrades, the Germans and the Poles and the Czechs.'

'You still haven't left the Party, have you, Giraud? What are you waiting for?'

'For this afternoon. If we can manage to make the others see sense – they're all good men, very important in the factory, and they're already wavering – if you can just give them the last push, then we'll all leave the Party in a body. But believe me, it won't be easy. . . . You've got thinner, but you don't look any more proletarian than you used to. In fact you look less like us than you did in the old days. If I had a spare room I'd invite you to stay and fatten you up a bit. Or you should get yourself a proper woman, one who never listens to what you say but sees to it that you eat properly. My friend's sister would be just the ticket, only she talks too much about getting married. You know the type, has you up in front of the registrar before you've time to turn around. Don't bother about your shoes, I'll give them a brush for you. Hurry up and get changed, or else we won't have time for a drink before we eat.'

There were seven other men besides Giraud and Faber. They all smoked the entire time so that occasionally the windows had to be opened. Then they would stop talking since they had no wish that the neighbours or the people in the street should hear what they said.

Doino's general summary of the political situation was not well done. His manner was too provocative, too embittered and too definite. He began on the wrong note, by quoting from the latest Moscow broadcast in German. The German workers had been told that France and England were the warmongers. There was not a word

of criticism against Hitler, and anybody who encouraged sabotage among the German workers engaged in war production was branded as a dangerous enemy of the Party. Doino remarked:

'Thousands of comrades have been sacrificed in the struggle against Hitler. For years we told the whole world that the Nazis were warmongers. Now Stalin spits on us, we're supposed to spit on ourselves and sing his praises and shout "Hallelujah! It's raining!"'

'I won't listen to such talk. That's not what we came here for,' shouted one of them. He was a short young man with a serious, tense face.

The others watched him attentively. Doino, too, looked at him for a while before saying sharply:

'What won't you listen to? And who entitled you to speak for the others? Tell us what you came here for, you personally, not the other comrades. Here each man speaks for himself.'

'Leave Stalin out of it, that's what I meant to say.'

'For more than ten years I've been fighting against Hitler and his allies. Should I now leave his ally Stalin out of it just because he's murdered more Communists than Hitler and Mussolini put together?'

'That's counter-revolutionary provocation!'

The man had got up as though to leave the room, but Doino had already walked across and seized hold of the lapel of his coat.

'What's that? Counter-revolutionary provocation? Is that what you said?'

Doino was shouting and his face had gone dead white. Then it was as though a dam had broken and the words poured out of his trembling body in a flood. And over and over again like a refrain came the questions:

'Where were you, when . . . ? What were you doing, when . . . ?'

The whole story of battles and defeats, of suffering, imprisonment, concentration camps and murdered friends, it all came out now, like a poisonous, bitter stream of vomit which he hurled into the young man's scarlet face.

The others were all now standing up. They listened intensely. Many of their faces reflected Doino's anguish, and many had stretched out a hand as though to separate the two men, but the gesture remained unfinished. No one intervened, not even Giraud.

'You dare to say that I am a counter-revolutionary? I speak, not for myself alone, but for my comrades and my friends who are dead, dead in Russia, in Germany, in Spain, in Yugoslavia, in Austria. You must betray them all, every one of them, in order to be true to Hitler's ally,

to Stalin. Maybe you're sincere about the revolution, young comrade, but you're already distributing the leaflets that Hitler's flyers are dropping on France. You're working for Hitler's victory, and soon enough your hands, too, will be stained with our blood.'

'Tell him that's not what you meant, Doucet,' one of the others said. 'Tell him you didn't want to insult the comrade!'

Doucet straightened his tie and took a step backwards. Then he said: 'The past doesn't count. It's possible, objectively speaking, to be a counter-revolutionary and a traitor without wanting to be one. That has to be understood dialectically.'

Doino had sat down again. He had difficulty in breathing. Now he gestured Doucet to come closer and asked:

'What does objectively mean? And what is dialectic?'

The young man repeated his question:

'What is dialectic? It's the law of development, if you follow me. For example, the policy of the Bolsheviks is dialectic, the pact with Hitler is dialectic. Don't you understand? You've got to feel it.'

'No. Feeling is for love or pity. For revolution and the politics of revolution you've got to think it.'

'Yes, that's just what I meant: to think, to think dialectically.'

'It's not what you meant. You don't think, you believe.'

'All right. I believe in Stalin. And you want us to believe in Daladier and Chamberlain instead!'

'No! You should not believe at all.'

'That's all right for you intellectuals. We've got to have something we can hold on to.'

It was an older man who had spoken now. He looked not unlike Soennecke, and had the same calm manner of speech, the same certainty that he would be listened to with confidence and respect.

'Believe in nothing, you say, Comrade Faber. I don't believe in Stalin. I'd fight against him, yes I would, Doucet, I'd agitate against him. But I won't be on the same side as the reactionary filth that I've hated and despised ever since I've been old enough to think.'

'And therefore you prefer to be on Hitler's side?'

'Not so fast, Faber, not so fast. You've had to deal with the proletariat for many years now, Faber. Haven't you learned yet that we don't like being hurried, that it makes us suspicious? The government tells us it's fighting Hitler. I can't see any signs of it. They put Communists and pacifists in gaol, they censor the press - I see signs of *that* every day. Fight the enemy in your own country first, that's always been one of the rules of the revolution. Doucet says you're a counter-revolutionary

and that's obviously stupid. He talks about dialectic and doesn't know what it is. I don't know either for sure, but I do know that if you threw Doucet in gaol I'd fight against the gaolers. I've been a Party member since the Congress of Tours. All the same, I'd tear up my Party card here and now except for the fact that the time to leave a party is not the very moment when it's declared illegal. Now go on with your summing-up. Take no notice of Doucet's silly interruptions. He isn't as bad as he sounds. What he says are not his own thoughts.'

More calmly and more carefully than before Doino continued to expound his ideas. He was talking now for Lagrange, the older man, for it was he above all whom he wished to convince. When he felt himself becoming excited he would stop for a moment and let his eyes wander among the photographs that hung above the bookcase. There were two big ones, of Marx and Lenin, and four smaller ones – on one side Maxim Gorki and Henri Barbusse, on the other Emile Zola and André Malraux.

Doino was sure of his arguments. He knew the effect that they must have on a man such as Lagrange. But he knew that he was speaking badly, too quickly, and with too much hatred. When he had finished there was a long pause. At last Lagrange said:

'Everything that you have said is right. But the conclusion it leads to is that we should make a holy alliance with the bourgeoisie in order to protect their France against Hitler. And that's not enough for a positive political attitude, because there'd be no knowing what we were really fighting for. Our government here is plainly becoming more and more fascist; are we to support it and to destroy a foreign fascism for its sake? Do you really think there's such a big difference between our prisons here and the concentration camps over the other side?'

'The difference between a blow on the head and a hanging. You knew that up to two months ago, but now you've already forgotten. Anybody who equates a normal, reactionary government, even a Balkan military dictatorship, with a totalitarian regime is either a liar or a fool.'

One of the men remarked ironically:

'The foreign comrade doesn't seem to think much of us.'

Doino looked him straight in the face and replied:

'Whether the workers' movement will collapse through lies or through ignorance is an interesting question, but one that I don't intend to discuss with you now. For myself, I gave up a bourgeois life and much else as well many years ago, because I made up my mind once and for all that I was against lying and against ignorance.'

'The proletariat knows what it wants,' the man replied, changing the subject. 'Maybe the Stalin-Hitler pact isn't particularly pretty, but it's smart. We're for peace, we don't want to die for the armament manufacturers.'

'Then why are you in favour of the pact that started this world war?'

'That's just it,' put in Doucet. 'That's dialectic.'

'Quiet, Doucet,' said Lagrange. 'Faber, you're disappointed in us. You intellectual revolutionaries have always had an entirely false picture of us, you've always expected too much. I can tell you that. I'm an old working-man who's read hundreds, maybe thousands, of pamphlets which I've had to explain to the comrades. It doesn't matter whether somebody's right or somebody's wrong in a discussion like this. I can tell you that you've convinced me. I'll be against sabotage in our factory from now on, and when people say that France is the aggressor and not Hitler, I'll tell them it isn't so. But for the rest we must wait and see. It'll all be clear in time. You say that by then it'll be too late. But it's never too late to break with the Party should that become absolutely necessary. But before I do that I must know exactly where I'm going. And that's the one question, Faber, that you can't answer, not with all your brains you can't. None of us wants to be alone, none of us could bear it. It's important to be right, but it's far more important not to be alone. Do you understand, Faber? I hope you're not angry with me for speaking so bluntly.'

He held out his hand to Doino. The others stood in a circle around them and said nothing. Only Doucet hung back. He was already working out how to 'pass on' all this talk, and particularly the remarkable and highly suspicious utterances of Lagrange.

'No, Lagrange, I'm not angry,' said Doino, 'I'm sad. These days more is being decided than you realise. The movement is finally becoming nothing but the agency of a totalitarian state, and as such it must sooner or later die. The working class has been untrue to its real mission - in these days the perspective of world history is changing.'

'You're exaggerating a lot,' replied Lagrange. 'You over-estimate the importance of an episode, of a momentary, tactical manoeuvre.'

'It won't be forgotten. The murder of Cain has never been forgotten though that, too, might have been described at the time as a momentary, tactical manoeuvre.'

'Come, Faber, let's go out and have a drink at the *bistro*.'*

Lagrange's tone was friendly, as though he wished to console him.

He took his arm, but Doino shook him off. At the door he turned back and said:

'My people don't drink after funerals.'

Gaby was waiting for him at the hotel and they went to the cinema together. The newsreel showed pictures of life at the front. The commentator spoke, with pathos, of 'our heroic soldiers out there'. It sounded as though he were describing some great, victorious battle which had been won at the cost of enormous sacrifice. In fact he was referring to a short patrol by a handful of men.

'It shouldn't be allowed,' said Gaby. 'That commentator is intolerable.'

'It's not his fault nor the fault of his text. This travesty is true: it may begin farcically, it will end with enough corpses for any tragedy.'

'I don't understand you,' said Gaby. 'Stetten would have put it more clearly.'

'Yes, he would. But you didn't understand him either, despite that. I don't want to quarrel with you, though.'

'Don't you even want to quarrel with me any more?' she asked with a smile. 'I'm becoming more and more useless to you.'

'No, it's not that. I've done enough quarrelling for one day. With men you don't know. Breaking with them means, simply, that everything I've done to date has been valueless. That is why I need you, your proximity and even your strangeness.'

'If you were a bit less frank you'd have said that differently and made me happy. All I want from you is an illusion, and it need not last for more than one evening. Is that too much to ask?'

He said nothing. Once again he became aware that he was incapable of giving a satisfactory answer to a simple question. Small truths become questionable when the big ones, on which a man had based his life, begin to disappear. He tried to remember his old arguments against illusions, and the reasons why he must refuse to allow Lagrange or Gaby to entertain them. If the historical perspective was shifting nothing was certain any more.

'Forgive me, Doino, I didn't mean to reproach you. I'm content that everything should be the way it is.'

She took his hand. He need not answer, and for this he was grateful to her. It was as if she had released him from a great oppression.

Together with three hundred other volunteers he waited in the barracks from ten in the morning until six at night. Then they were

marched to the station. When they were in the train guards were posted, two to a truck, with loaded rifles, as though they might try to escape. From this moment on the authorities were doubtless determined to forget that these men had volunteered.

They reached Lyons during the night and had to wait until morning for the train that was to take them to their destination a few miles away.

One man said:

'I've been in the army before. In the Polish Army. If you keep an officer waiting even a couple of minutes you'd think you'd wasted half his life. But they keep whole companies waiting for hours on end. I don't care one way or the other, it don't make no difference to me. Here I sit and maybe my wife's already in bed with the fellow from across the street. I tell you it don't make no difference to me. Only he shouldn't go making her a baby. Why should I have to feed another man's kid. Can anybody tell me that?'

The man was drunk. He had frozen in the train because he had had no coat. Now his bottle of spirits was empty. He kept on raising it to the light to make sure that there was really nothing left, and then he would swear in Ukrainian. Finally he sprawled across the table, half turned so that his cheek was resting upon the empty bottle, and was soon asleep.

'But there'll be a brothel, anyhow, won't there?'

This was the third time that the boy had asked this question. His eyes were bloodshot and he had difficulty in keeping them open. The bored soldier who guarded them answered:

'Don't worry. A man with money can find a brothel anywhere. Will your parents send you money?'

'Yes. But I'm asking you if there's a brothel and if the women are worth what it costs.'

The soldier gave a detailed reply. He described unenthusiastically the three ageing women from whom the boy would be able to make his choice.

'But if you want one that bad you've got a better selection right here behind the station, first left and first right. That's the place for you. They've even got a negress. And negresses, you know, they're always a bit of all right.'

'Yes. You mean there is a brothel where we're going? Or are you just saying that for fun, or because maybe you think I'm too young? Because if that's what you think let me tell you this . . .'

Doino walked along the platform. Snow was falling, big flakes that soon covered the tracks. Far up the platform a man was sitting and

singing to himself. It was a strange song, partly Yiddish and partly Russian. There was only one Hebrew word in it, *Adoni*, the Lord.

'If my singing annoys you go and sit on another bench. The station's big enough.

'It doesn't annoy me.'

'You can say that now. But I always sing. If I'm not singing or eating I've got to smoke. When I worked in the oil wells in Drohobycz they almost killed me, the other men I mean. So I took up humming instead. They hated that worse than the singing. Later in Paris I worked in the Citroën works. You can't smoke there all the time, either. And if you could, we're not millionaires, are we? Where's the money for the fags to come from, eh? You've got to eat and pay rent. All the same, it was pretty good in Paris. Now what's going to happen, eh? Now what?'

'How do you mean?' Doino asked, offering him a cigarette.

'How do I mean, you ask? I'll tell you. Where am I going to get the money for my smokes? They give you fifty centimes a day and a few fags, and you've still got to pay for them. What with, eh? There's nobody going to be sending me money, because Bernard's got nobody. Bernard, that's me. My real name's Yankel-Berl, but you can call me Bernard. I've got sort of used to it. The others, they're all tailors, the Jews I mean, so when they get in the army they can pick up a bit extra that way. But how about me? Or you? You don't look like a tailor. I expect you're a salesman, maybe even a shopkeeper?'

'Sing that song again about the shepherd who lost his sheep.'

Bernard put his cigarette butt away in a flat, metal box, sat upright, and closed his eyes. He had a pretty voice, though weak. While he sang he swayed the upper part of his body from side to side, slowly and rhythmically. Doino turned up his coat collar, dug his hands deep into his overcoat pockets and leaned back.

Bernard sang:

*He went on and he saw
A cart full of white stones,
And these were not the bones
Of his little white sheep.*

*Adoni, Adoni, he cried,
Have you seen my little sheep?
Has it strayed along your way?
Without my little sheep I can't,
I won't go home.*

Doino was dropping off to sleep. Bernard picked up his feet and put them on the bench. Then he twisted him around so that they were back to back.

The wind was not too cold nor too strong. It blew the snowflakes gently along the platform. Doino awoke for a moment. Bernard was singing again, his song had many verses. Again and again the shepherd would think to find traces of his lost sheep, but when he asked the people nobody had seen it. No, there would be no homecoming for him.

PART THREE

. . . To Dusty Death

CHAPTER I

'AND write it plain, Faber, so as she'll understand once and for all and won't forget in a hurry. Write this: You knew I was a widower with a child when you married me, and I told you over and over as how I'd work for you and do everything for you when you was my wife, but the chief thing was that my child should have it good and should have a proper mother. And you swore you'd be a mother to him just like as if he was your own child. That's what you promised, and I believed you. And when you said you'd got to have a change and you absolutely must go to the seaside, I said all right and I worked and I worked till I nearly dropped. Write that to her, Faber, and tell her this. I never complained, I never took a day off, not the Jewish holidays or the Christian ones either, and I did that so as you'd be good to my little Jacquot like I was good to you. And now there's a war and I'm in the army and you're all alone with the two kids, may God prevent you from being a bad stepmother to little Jacquot. Don't think he's been complaining, he hasn't. But I know you've been beating him and I don't want you to beat him. He's an orphan, it's true, but it's not his fault his mother died, is it? And write this, Faber, write this too. Just because you're unhappy you mustn't work it off on Jacquot, and don't go thinking I'll forget either. Because one day, with God's help, I'll come back. And don't go thinking – that Bernard and his psalms, it's enough to drive a man out of his mind. Tell him to stow it, Faber. You know what he does? He picks the shortest psalms and I've got to give him a cigarette for each one just the same as if they was the proper length. I don't know what I'm writing myself with that din going on all the time.'

Bernard stopped his soft singing for a moment and said:

'Naturally you don't know what you're writing, Léon, because it's not you who's writing, it's Faber. And he likes having me sit here and sing. And don't go saying that again about my only picking the short psalms so as to get more cigarettes. It's insulting.'

The quarrel became more violent. Léon was a tall, thin fellow with arms that were disproportionately short, small hands and a tiny face that was almost entirely covered with black stubble. His sad eyes were smouldering now with menacing rage. In his excitement he stumbled

over his words and this embarrassed him. Bernard did not shout. The sturdy little man with the squashed-looking face was quite certain that he was in the right. They had arranged that Léon would give him cigarettes whenever Faber wrote a letter for him. The number of cigarettes depended on the length of the letter, measured in psalms: if Bernard sang three psalms while Léon was dictating, the fee was three cigarettes. If the letter was longer – and as the weeks went by Léon's letters did grow longer – then there were more psalms and more cigarettes. They weren't a present, they were the agreed payment from Léon to Faber, only the latter had said that Bernard might have them.

'I told you both at the beginning,' Doino put in, 'that the system was no good. Fix the charge according to the number of pages. That would be the best way.'

'The number of pages! Bloody rotten idea!' Bernard was also losing his temper now. 'And suppose he buys paper with pages so big he can get two letters on one page? I don't trust that Léon!'

'So he doesn't trust me? A crook like him who picks the shortest psalms, and I've got to pay like they was the proper length!'

'You're a liar, Léon, and an ignorant liar too. You've never been taught. You don't know a word of Hebrew. Day before yesterday when Faber was writing for you I sang the Eighteenth. Not one of my favourites, but all the same I wanted to go straight through. And, incidentally, one of the longest ones. David took his time over that one, on account of having won his war and not having much else to do just then. I could easily have missed it out and you'd never have known. Today I started with the Nineteenth, not too short, not too long. The Twentieth, I grant you, that's a short one. The Twenty-first, that's on the short side too. But the Twenty-second! That one goes on and on and on like the diaspora. David had got unhappy again, and that should have suited you down to the ground, naturally, because you're a miserable sort of sod yourself. And then I sang the Twenty-third. As a matter of fact I sang it twice. And why not? I can sing them twice over if I want, can't I? Particularly as that happens to be my favourite one of the lot. And just to show you, I'm going to sing it again now.'

In normal times this little oblong room was the parlour behind the village grocery which a woman owned. She had taken out all the furniture and put in one long table. The soldiers had brought benches. At night the room was crowded. The soldiers who could not find a place to sit down on the benches would stand and lean against the wall. The woman made a good profit. Her barn, which served as a billet for the thirty-seven men, had long been useless. There were no doors, the roof

leaked, and in any case it was too small. But the grocer had made a deal with the N.C.O. and she got paid the full billeting rate. It was a cold winter and the soldiers were half frozen out there. They had to take refuge in her parlour. There they drank the bad wine she sold them; mixed with water and a little sugar, she heated it up and passed it off on them as punch. Twice already she'd raised the price and they'd grumbled, naturally, but what could they do? The only inn was at the far end of the village, and needless to say the wine was no cheaper there; besides, the inn was not as well heated as this room. The soldiers fetched logs from the woods and by noon the stove was red-hot. This was the only place where they could get warm and dry when they came back from training in the deep snow.

This evening there were about twenty of them crowded into the little room. Some slept, some wrote letters, some played cards, while others told boring stories about their life in 'civvy street', those lives which were only now beginning to reveal their hidden charm. The room was filled with smoke and thick clouds of it dimmed the light of the single, feeble, electric-light bulb. The noise of talk, some loud, some soft, merged into one continual din, but the men soon became accustomed to the noise which, on first entering the room, sounded deafening.

They had paid no attention to Bernard's singsong. They had become used to this mania of his and had given up all attempts to silence him. But now, when his voice grew louder and his song more insistent, they felt that the strange words which this fool pronounced so fervently might perhaps contain some meaning which could affect them all. Even the three Poles by the stove – they had worked in the French mines, had fought in Spain, returned to France and been interned, and had finally volunteered for the army – even they listened. This singsong business was ridiculous, and usually they jeered at the singer with bitter hatred, but tonight it seemed different somehow, and they listened.

'*Adoni roi lo ekhsar*,' Bernard began, for the third time. '*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.*

'*Gam ki elekh bygei tsalmoveth . . . Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me. . . .*

Bernard had told Faber a certain amount about his past life. He knew that Bernard had studied the Holy Book intensively until, suddenly, the impoverishment of his family had forced him to change his manner of life and to take a job in the oilfields. Bernard certainly knew that these Hebrew words were filled with mercy and consolation, with

gentle hope and gratitude, yet the way he pronounced them they sounded as though they contained nothing save despair and endless misery.

The appearance of the drunken corporal was entirely unexpected. He stood at the door, his rifle pointed at the singer and shouted with insane fury:

'Stand up! I'm gonna shoot you! Stand up! I was in the Legion and I'm gonna kill you! Stand up, all of you, I'm your superior officer, aren't I? Stand up! But I'm only going to shoot one of you. The bloody parson over there.'

They rose slowly to their feet, one after the other. The man was completely unpredictable. This sort of thing happened every two or three days, but who knows? the gun might be loaded this time. Bernard had gone quite white. He raised his arms above his head and he did not realise that he was still chanting the psalm. With trembling voice he recited:

'Thou preparedest a table for me in the presence of mine enemies . . .

The corporal pulled back the safety catch. At that moment an order rang out:

'Halt! Prece-sent arms!'

The corporal obeyed. The others watched in amazement while Litvak walked across to him, snatched the rifle from his hands, and calmly unloaded it. The drunken man tried to grab him by the throat, but Kitvak knocked him to the ground with a single blow. Then he said:

'Take him away and put him in the straw. Wash his face first with snow. Somebody had better stay with him until he's asleep.'

When he turned around the others were startled to see that he looked in no way changed: his spectacles were, as usual, perched comically on the bridge of his nose, and his expression was as sleepy as ever. For Litvak, who had only joined them two weeks before, had immediately assumed the rôle of the traditional 'awkward soldier' of the platoon, a sort of harmless village idiot in their little military community. The men at the quartermaster's stores had amused themselves by rigging him up in the most hideous bits of uniform. His tunic, which was too small for him, dated from the previous war: it was horizon blue, with great rust-coloured stains both in front and behind. His tattered puttees were invariably badly tied and flapping loose. His shoes were regular tug-boats, undoubtedly the largest size available. Even his cap was of unusual cut and far too small for him. He never took it off. He ate a great deal, greedily and quickly, and when not actually eating he

seemed to be almost invariably asleep. He was never punished since his superiors had decided that he was not all there; the non-commissioned officers treated him as a joke, laughing at his stumbling French which he spoke even worse than the others. His voice was lazy and slow, as though he had to hunt for the simplest words; the word he eventually found was invariably the wrong one.

What he had done now, and the manner in which he had spoken, were far more amazing than the corporal's mad rage – it was all quite incomprehensible. Now he turned to Bernard and, speaking in Yiddish, said in his usual, halting way:

'Psalms are useful to calm a child's diarrhoea or to soften the heart of the Lord so that he'll stop a pogrom; but they're useless against wars and Foreign Legionaries. If your friend Faber wants biblical texts, tell him to buy himself a Bible next time he gets a pass for Lyons.'

Bernard replied:

'It was only on account of the letter, because Léon said . . .'

Litvak was not listening. They all watched him as he walked out through the door. Yes, he was wearing the same shoes, he was the same grotesquely awkward soldier.

Doino caught up with him in the road in front of the house. Litvak said:

'Since things have reached this stage, there's something I'd better ask you now. It's a matter of a bridge.'

Doino looked him in the face, hesitated for a moment, and then said:

'... the white stone bridge . . .'

'... that collapsed in the night, the night of the seventeenth . . .'

'... eighteenth April 1937.' Doino had finished the sentence.

It was the recognition signal, so the man came from Djoura. They shook hands as though this were the first reunion of two old friends. In silence they walked away from the house and up the gentle incline of the snow-covered road.

'I fought at Warsaw. When it was all over I escaped through Rumania and Yugoslavia. I met Djoura there, and Mara and Albert Gräfe, too, who had just arrived. I came here by way of Italy. They put me in gaol at first, but finally they let me volunteer for the army. Misha Litvak is my real name. You've certainly heard of me. I used to be called Sergei Liboff.'

Doino stopped and, looked closely at Litvak. Without cap or spectacles his appearance was completely different. The night was clear, for the snow reflected the light of the moon.

'Liboff!' Doino repeated. 'I heard that Liboff had died years ago,

killed in a skirmish with the Japanese, or shot at Chelbiansk, or dead in mysterious circumstances in a Stalingrad hospital.'

And suddenly he laughed aloud. This 'awkward soldier' was one of the very few military geniuses produced by the Russian revolution, a man who had become a legend in his own lifetime. Litvak also laughed. Then, suddenly becoming serious, he said:

'From the current point of view the pathetic, heroic Liboff is probably even more ridiculous a figure than the weak-minded volunteer, Misha Litvak.'

'Don't talk nonsense.'

'In any case I'm not dramatising. I've disowned Liboff. I would rather be dead than not disown him,' Litvak said.

He put on his cap again, and his spectacles, and began to walk with his curious shambling gait. Without noticing it they went faster and faster, so that by the time they reached the edge of the next village they were quite short of breath. They returned more slowly.

'Had it not been for that stupid incident I should not have told you who I am. You've fitted in well here, and you've made good friends of the little tailors for whom you write letters.'

'In Shakespeare's tragedies men of the people are always comic figures. The oafs say what's on their minds and the audience laughs. Thanks to them it's possible to forget for a little while that there must be a fifth act.'

'Talk to me exactly as you talk to those "oafs". I find intellectual conversation boring with its eternal historic and literary allusions. I've long given up the effort of trying to understand allusions. It's not worth while.'

'Was it worth while fighting in encircled Warsaw?'

'Of course not. But it would have been more boring just to watch.'

'Are you really so frightened of being bored?'

'No. I go to sleep. I can sleep anywhere and at any time. That's the finest gift there is. You don't care for people who eat and sleep a great deal. I've noticed that during the past couple of weeks.'

'I didn't know who you were.'

'What do you know about me now, Faber? Legends, some of which are perhaps true. What have they got to do with me? Or with you for that matter, an average second-class soldier waiting to be sent to a front which doesn't exist and perhaps never will exist?'

'What do you think of the general situation?'

'The battle-hymn of the new French Army is a slow dance-tune in which a crooner swears that he'll wait, day and night, for ever and ever.'

J'attendrai toujours. . . . The soldiers write love letters and beg their wives to send them a little pocket-money because their pay is so absurdly small; they also complain that they're given bromide in their wine. Normal speech is replaced by a mixture of obscene words that have lost all meaning. No doubt it will also have to replace masculine heroism. Your Jewish tailors have never learned French, but they've managed to pick up this jargon. I cannot tell whether or not the French General Staff has learned anything from the Polish campaign. But if they have then I fail to understand why we recruits are being given such idiotic training.'

'So you're a pessimist?'

'What do you mean, a pessimist?' Litvak asked. He laughed disagreeably and crossly. 'Do you know the story of the old man who complained to the doctor that it was difficult for him to urinate? The doctor replied: "You're seventy-nine years old and you've pissed quite enough already." I think we'll soon all have pissed enough, Faber. That's not pessimism. But enough's enough.'

'We can talk more tomorrow. Now it's time to sleep,' said Doino. 'I've got a good sleeping-bag. You can have my blanket. The one they gave you is too short.'

'We're both going to regret this meeting. We were so very snug, each in his own solitude. Now if the people see us frequently together they'll realise that we're a couple of lepers.'

'I daresay,' said Doino, holding out his hand. 'Sooner or later the blind discover whether a man was born blind or whether he lost his eyesight later on. Take the blanket.'

Almost all the others were lying down on the straw, wrapped up in all their clothes. Here a man dressed rather than undressed before sleeping. They watched with astonishment while Doino handed Litvak his blanket. One of them whispered:

'I can easily fix it so your pal swaps his gear for proper stuff. I can fix it tomorrow if you like.'

Doino looked at the man's sly face and asked:

'What do you want for doing it? I've hardly any money left.'

'I don't want nothing. Just this. Why do you have to write letters for Léon all the time? He's not the only one here. Now and then you might write a letter for me, when I want one in a proper, fine hand. And other things like that. That's all I want. Besides, I'm just as interesting to talk to as Bernard or Litvak. So tomorrow I'll scrounge him a good khaki greatcoat and a proper pair of shoes. The rest I'll fix later.'

It had begun to snow again. The wind blew the flakes through the

gaps in the wall on to the straw and the sleeping men. Litvak was already asleep. He had turned down the ear-flaps of his grotesque cap so that almost his whole face was hidden. All the others had woollen Balaclava helmets, some of which were quite well knitted. Litvak was the poorest of them all. He was the only one who never got a parcel, was never sent money, and only very rarely received a letter. He did not wait for the post. He waited for nothing. He had fallen too far, deeper than the depths.

The non-commissioned officers were sorry that Litvak no longer looked so comic. They still did their best to laugh at him, but their jokes fell flat. His gait, it is true, remained as curious as ever, as though he were perpetually struggling through thick and sticky mud. His figure, too, remained odd. He was tall and emaciated but with a surprisingly round and prominent belly which looked as artificial as did the great bony nose stuck to the middle of his small face. Apart from that nose his other features – on the rare occasions when they were not hidden beneath a reddish-grey stubble – were delicate and finely drawn.

They became accustomed to the fact that Litvak was just a soldier like all the others, though far more awkward and incompetent than the rest.

Twice each day they went out to train. For months on end they practised the same movements and the same drill, both with and without rifles. The most important part of their training seemed to be that the soldiers should look well on parade, should be able to keep their dressing on the march, should shoulder or present arms according to the book, and should know how to salute. Almost all their N.C.O's, from the corporal to the sergeant-major, were Foreign Legionaries who had served for many years in Africa and had fought against the natives there. When it came to 'theoretical' instruction – which consisted primarily in stripping down the light machine gun, explaining its mechanism and re-assembling it once again – they proved their lack of ability. The men sat in the barn, bitterly cold, while from the corner came the improbable sound of Bernard intoning his psalms. The corporal, who could only speak with difficulty since he had as yet had nothing to drink, stood over the dismantled machine gun, swearing monotonously in words that were almost invariably obscene references to the female anatomy. Finally he gave up and hurried off 'to have one'. Then the sergeant appeared – the only N.C.O. who was not from the Legion; he wore the badge of a regiment of *Chasseurs Alpins* – and with a few capable gestures reassembled the gun. He let them smoke, even handing around a box of cigarettes which his parents-in-law had sent

him, and swore about the cold, about the wretched barn, about the mayor of the village who refused to assign them decent billets even though there were houses standing empty. He spoke to them of the art of war and how to become a famous general or even a Marshal of France. 'Before you get your seven stars you've got to have killed off at least two hundred thousand of your own troops.' Then the sergeant-major appeared unexpectedly. He was furious and said that smoking was forbidden during 'theoretical instruction'. He jumped on Bernard, who had begun to sing again since he might not smoke. The sergeant-major asked Bernard what he was singing. Bernard tried to explain that he was in the middle of the *Prayer for the Dew and the Hoarfrost*, but unfortunately he did not know the French for dew, so he said he was praying for rain. He was given two weeks confined to barracks, which was no punishment since there weren't any barracks. But the threat that his leave might be stopped was serious. When at last the sergeant-major was about to go, the corporal reappeared, bellowing:

'All outside, trench-digging! To hell with the machine gun, a soldier's got to know how to dig a proper trench!'

The sergeant-major shouted at the corporal, threatening him with fourteen days' close arrest. They must all go outside for a ten-minute run across the fields, then they must lay out their kit for kit-inspection. He'd be back in twenty minutes, and any man whose kit was not laid out according to the book would be for it. But he didn't come back. Besides, there was no flat place for the men to lay out their kit, which they usually just hid in the straw.

That afternoon there was a long training march. It poured with rain. With the sergeant-major at their head they covered fourteen miles, and by the time they arrived back they were soaked to the skin. Bernard explained it to Léon, with whom he was on good terms once again:

'Armies are all the same, they all believe in toughening you up. They toughened me up for two years in the Austrian Army, till November 12, 1918, that was. Then it was the same story in the Polish Army, nineteen months of it I had there. And now I'm forty-one years old and it's the French are toughening me up.'

'And what a way to set about it!' said Léon. 'Back home in the busy season I often worked at my machine for fourteen, even sixteen, hours. If the neighbours didn't always complain to the concierge I'd have worked nights too. I couldn't hardly find time for a bite to eat or to go to the closet. Here, what do we do? Nothing. Here we go for a walk in the rain. Back home I don't have time to go for walks even when the sun is shining. As for toughening you up, all it does for me is give me a

cold in the head, all this walking about in the rain. Does that make you a tough soldier, having a runny nose?"

'You don't understand, Léon. The toughening up, that's for when you go to the front. You see, when you're stuck in a trench, and maybe you won't like it there, you'll be able to say: "Back at the billets we didn't have it so good either. I'd just as soon be here at the front." That's what you'll say. It's like work. It's a toughening up for when you're out of a job.'

'Wrong way round,' one of the others put in. 'Unemployment is toughening up for when you've got a job. Take me, for instance. In civvy street I worked in a furniture factory. . . .'

Bernard wouldn't let the man finish. A violent quarrel began in which several of the others joined. They could not agree which way round it should be. One of them, as a joke, wanted to ask Litvak for his opinion. Then they noticed that he was asleep.

'He's tough enough. He can sleep sitting, standing or marching. Isn't that just what I was saying? Poor people don't need toughening up; it's the officers what live like kings, they're the ones who ought to be trained to live hard. They try to teach us poor devils to be tough. I tell you this Litvak could learn them a trick or two.'

They all laughed.

Litvak's pretence of oafishness continued. He refused to speak of the past. When he walked along the country roads with Doïno, in the evenings, he insisted they talk just like the others, about their superiors, the food, the chances of getting a pass on Sunday, the latrine rumours. The most sensational news was spread every day concerning world events and the future prospects of the battalion or company to which they belonged; secret peace negotiations were just about to be signed; a Senegalese regiment had broken through the Siegfried Line; Roosevelt had had a secret meeting with Hitler; the bearded captain had caught Lieutenant Crillon in bed with his, the captain's, mistress, and they'd had a fight and Lieutenant Crillon had beaten up the captain, but nothing had happened to the lieutenant because he knew of the captain's deal with the quarter-master, which was why the grub was always so rotten; the sergeant-major had got an anonymous letter from his home village in Normandy, and now believed his wife was openly carrying on with the parish clerk. The latrine rumours knew everything; for example, the exact date on which Mussolini would declare war on his pal Hitler; or that on March 16th the whole company was to get ten days' leave before being shipped to the front on March 31st. It

was also a matter of common knowledge that the war would end on April 3rd.

Litvak thoroughly enjoyed listening to this sort of talk. He observed with interest the behaviour of his comrades, most of whom were no longer young, but who struck up friendships and broke them off again with the ease of small boys at a holiday camp.

He refused to discuss politics, seriously maintaining that he found it a far more boring subject than, say, a detailed article on the 1925 Lodz-Lublin bicycle race. Banality was his protection, a safeguard which he seemed reluctant to abandon even for a moment. Twice Doino succeeded in making him talk, once about the campaign in Poland and once about French strategy. Dispassionately he analysed the reasons for the rapid Polish defeat, praising the methods employed by the Germans who had made practically no mistakes. He said that they could be relied on not to repeat their few errors.

His comments on French strategy ended with the words:

'The French should have broken through Belgium and Holland in September. Why didn't they? Because they didn't think they were strong enough? Or because they were afraid of casualties? In any case it's too late now; or two, three, maybe four years too early. If Hitler is crazy and allows them that much time, then they've got a chance of winning. Should he attack this year the best we can hope for is that he'll knock out a quarter of the French army and occupy Eastern France - assuming, that is, that the French fight as well as they did in the last war, and that the General Staff has learned the lessons of the Polish campaign. If these assumptions are incorrect Hitler will conquer France even quicker than he did Poland.'

'But that's impossible, it's inconceivable,' cried Doino. He was horrified.

Litvak stopped walking and gazed at him curiously.

'Inconceivable? Why?' he asked in a serious tone. 'You don't pay enough attention to latrine rumours, which incidentally are the same throughout the entire army. They're false, of course, those rumours, but they're still far more revealing than the official news. Don't you understand what this *drôle de guerre* is all about, do you perhaps also believe that it's just a little period of waiting? The man who won't fight won't be beaten. This golden rule is only true so long as the enemy agrees. Once the enemy ceases to agree, refusal to fight entails the certainty of defeat. Apart from that, have you ever in your life, ever once, been on the winning side? Why should this time be the exception? But far more important than all that, have you heard that the

grocer-woman's putting up the price of chocolate? It seems wine's going to go up soon, too, even though they say . . .'

The snow had melted and been washed away by the rain; now to reach the barracks, four miles away to the south of their village, they had to march along roads that were deep in mud. For the fifth time since their arrival the company was to have firing practice on the rifle range. The first and third time the march had been wasted, since the range turned out to be occupied when they arrived. So they were taken to the showers instead. They had to undress outside, in the snow. It was very cold. Only when they had stripped down to their underpants were they allowed to enter the bath-huts. Then it was discovered that there was something wrong with the showers; they could produce nothing save a thin trickle of cold water.

On this occasion, however, it was a more successful outing, perhaps because Lieutenant Crillon had come with them. He was a very young officer, but an energetic one. Rumour had it that his uncle was a colonel or even a general, and that for that reason his superiors went out of their way to be agreeable to him. He treated reserve officers, even such as were above him in rank, in a somewhat patronising manner which they did not appear to resent.

This time they only had to wait for an hour and a half. Their luck was in, because the rain soon stopped and the sun came out. Then, at twelve o'clock, they were marched on to the barracks' range. They had to lie down on planks while the big numbered targets were put up at the far end of the field. Each man was given three cartridges which he might shoot off as practice. Then he fired off five rounds according to which his score was computed. The man who did best was to get a twenty-four hour pass for Lyons.

Crillon walked over to Litvak and said:

'All three of your practice shots were miles off. Not one of them even came near the target. I know you're just a half-witted tailor, but it's not all that difficult. So try harder, because these ones count. Now fire!'

The marker's flag indicated that the bullet had gone way off to one side. The second did likewise. Crillon banged the plank on which Litvak was lying with his swagger-stick. Then, suddenly losing his temper, he began to shout. He went purple in the face and hit Litvak on the hand and on the back of the neck. Litvak got up with his rifle in his hand, stared down at the little officer, and deliberately inserted another cartridge in the breech. When Doino shouted: 'Misha, don't do it!' he straightened his spectacles on the bridge of his nose and slowly

lay down again like a large dog. With his remaining three rounds he got two bulls and one inner.

The young officer said, with embarrassment:

'You see? It's not so difficult.'

'Yes. That's the way I shoot when I want to kill someone. And I kill any man who dares to strike me.'

'Are you mad, you lout?'

'Probably, since I'm here and allow you to insult me. I wish to lodge a complaint. You have no right to strike a subordinate.'

Crillon hesitated. He knew the intensity with which the others were observing the scene between them. He ordered that Litvak be immediately relieved of rifle, belt, puttees, and shoe-laces; that he be marched back to the village; and that he be placed under close arrest. The corporal and two privates escorted him.

'I only read a few of them which I take at random from the outgoing and incoming mail,' said the sergeant, 'though of course there are special cases, when we're told to keep an eye on some particular soldier. Then I read all the letters he gets or sends. Here's the list of suspect men. As you see, Lieutenant, this Litvak isn't on it. I checked with the regimental orderly room. Litvak's never before had a parcel, money or a registered letter. It seems he has so far only received two ordinary letters. This one's the third. I've read it and it's quite uninteresting. Perhaps you'd care to glance through it yourself, sir? And then today he got a parcel, containing the flute that his auntie mentions in the letter.'

When Crillon took the letter from its envelope a little photograph fell out. He waited until the sergeant had walked around the table, picked it up, and handed it to him. It was of an elderly woman with thin, white hair parted exactly down the middle of her skull. Her eyes were half shut and her mouth tightly closed. Unpleasantly surprised by the close resemblance of this strange woman to his maternal grandmother, the lieutenant hastily replaced the photograph in the envelope.

There were eight pages of large handwriting with almost no space between the lines. The letter was in French and the writer, though her spelling was poor, was quite capable of expressing her ideas. The lieutenant assumed that she had lived in France for a long time.

'That's curious!' said Crillon. 'It seems Litvak isn't a tailor at all but a musician. His aunt writes about the Petersburg Conservatoire, where he apparently won the first prize and a gold medal in nineteen-sixteen or seventeen. What did he give as his civilian occupation?'

'Assistant book-keeper. The woman hadn't heard from him for many years. She thought his profession was flute-playing. Of course he may have changed. He came from a village near Vilna, so he's been a Polish subject since the Russian revolution. Perhaps that's why he couldn't go on with his flute-playing in Russia.'

'It seems to me confused and not at all convincing,' said Crillon severely. The sergeant did not reply. He wished this over-keen young lieutenant to the devil.

'The writer refers to her brother - that's probably Litvak's father - once as a bookbinder and once as a flautist.'

'He might have been an amateur,' said the sergeant. The sergeant was bored.

'No, she specifically says that he played at parties and made money by it. Have you, in fact, read the whole letter through carefully?'

'Yes, sir, I have,' replied the sergeant irritably. He had only glanced through it. As unit censor he had to read a great many letters, most of which were excessively dull. The only ones which interested him were the love-letters, not the sentimental but the passionate ones, in which the writer's unsatisfied desires produced a frenzy of hallucination.

'Doesn't this story of the musician who tried to murder his wife strike you as suspicious? The aunt writes her nephew two whole pages about an incident which cannot possibly be of any interest to him. I'd be prepared to bet there's more in this than meets the eye.'

'She told him about it because the flute she was sending him had apparently belonged to the man. What should an old woman write about then?'

Crillon glanced sharply at the sergeant. Was he perhaps laughing at him?

'I want you to keep the letter and the parcel, at least for as long as the addressee is under arrest.'

The lieutenant banged on the table with his swagger-stick. The N.C.O. muffled a yawn and replied:

'My immediate superior is Lieutenant Berry. I don't believe he'll think the flute in any way suspicious. And now, sir, I must hurry or I shall miss my dinner. I'm sorry, sir, but I must lock up here. Those are my orders!'

But Crillon insisted on examining the flute. The sergeant undid the parcel and handed it to him.

'There might be a message tucked in here, don't you think so, sergeant?'

'No, sir, definitely not. Spy movies are silly, sir, and you shouldn't

take no notice of them, at least not on active service you shouldn't. I must lock up now, sir. I'm sorry, sir, but I don't fancy a cold dinner.'

It was a wooden hut, normally used by the village fire brigade for storing equipment. Now it was empty save for Litvak, the solitary prisoner. Crillon had insisted that he be segregated from the other two men who were under arrest: these were two old Foreign Legionaries who, when they drew their pay and long service allowances on the fifteenth of each month, regularly drank themselves into a stupor, caused trouble in the village and had to be locked up for periods ranging from three to eight days. Thus No. 28 Company now boasted of two prisons, which of course entailed extra guard duty both by day and by night.

The floor of the hut consisted of damp clay and the small quantity of straw allowed the prisoner was soon sodden. The tiny window let in almost no light, but Litvak did not read. Indeed they had to wake him when they brought him his food. Doino accepted guard duty three times within a week. He and Litvak could easily have talked, but Litvak spoke only in monosyllables. He maintained that he had not been so happy for years. The only things he lacked were acid drops and chocolates and perhaps a little more straw owing to the dampness of his quarters.

On the ninth day of his imprisonment he appeared before the captain. He had demanded this interview as a right. He complained of the lieutenant's behaviour, was insulted for his pains, and dismissed. When his fifteen days were up the men of the company were informed that Litvak was to do another fifteen days. The reason for this further sentence was not made clear. There was, apparently, no question of mutiny or of a refusal to obey orders, but simply of conduct prejudicial to military discipline and of lack of respect towards a superior officer.

That evening Doino was not on parade. He only reappeared late the next afternoon. He was sentenced to fifteen days' close arrest. He had previously arranged with the corporal that he too be put in the firemen's hut.

Litvak greeted him with the words:

'God must have been in a fine rage when he decided to create anything as stupid as an intellectual. You've gone and got yourself locked up so as to keep me company. With the result that there's now no one outside to look after me. I need more straw, chocolate, tobacco and cigarette papers. Instead I get you.'

Doino undid his trousers, loosened his flannel belt, and let fall on to the clay floor chocolate, tobacco, a lighter and cigarette papers.

'Good,' said Litvak in a somewhat more friendly manner. 'Now where's the straw?'

'It will be delivered after midnight,' Doino replied.

He lay down on his palliasse and pulled his greatcoat up over him. From the pockets he took two ocarinas. The black one he kept for himself, the brown he handed to Litvak.

'I've got some instructions on how to play the thing, but the light's too bad here to read them. I have to learn how before the war's over.'

'By four o'clock on the afternoon after the war. Djoura told me. Give me a bar of chocolate. You can look away while I eat it because you don't like to see how greedy I am. When I'm asleep hide the other bars in a safe place; otherwise I'll eat them too.'

Late that night Doino awoke. Litvak was sitting with his back against the wall, playing the ocarina, first a slow melody, then a dance tune, then another sad song. When he realised that Doino was awake he stopped and lay down again.

'You remind me of my father, Faber, and that's no compliment. He's a bookbinder in a town of four thousand inhabitants. Only the very poorest people ever ask him to bind a book for them - an old prayer book, perhaps, or the Pentateuch - because you see they can't afford to buy new copies of that essential literature. You'll notice that he picked his career with consummate skill. He has, it is true, two further sources of income. He plays the flute in a band that is engaged for wedding parties and other such rare occasions when music is required. But even with that he couldn't have managed to bring up five children. His real job has always been writing letters. It's not well paid, because the people who ask him to write their letters generally have no money and he has to do it on credit. However, every now and then somebody in America sends dollars, two or three dollars, sometimes five, occasionally even ten. Much depends on the number sent. My father believed that his literary style had a definite effect on the hearts of the generous Americans. So he wrote letters for their mothers and aunts and grand-parents, because of course all the people who sent money from America came originally from our little town. If three letters produced neither answer nor money the assumption was that the addressee must be either dead or destitute. Or, of course, he might be just hardhearted, an idea that the letter-writer found deeply upsetting. Not only because if no money came he would almost certainly not be paid for his trouble; not only because he knew precisely how acute was the poverty of the people on whose behalf he had written; no, worse than either of those was the doubt in his own

artistic powers which a failure inevitably raised. Therefore he usually wrote a fourth letter on his own initiative, a clever composition in a mixture of Yiddish and Hebrew. In Yiddish he would ask for money, in Hebrew he would show that it is more blessed to give than to receive; in Yiddish he would describe the misery of the suppliant, in the Holy Tongue he would threaten and curse the hardhearted. He had at his disposal superbly apt quotations, but he knew that none of his readers would understand them. He was the only man who really read those letters of his and who truly understood them in all their subtlety. Mother would say to him: "If you don't earn fifty kopeks right away we won't have any white bread for the Sabbath Day." Then he would reply: "So sad! The widow Pesie with the paralysed daughter and the consumptive son has a proper cousin in America. I've written him three letters and all he's sent her is a photograph. Not a single dollar! I don't know what to do. Pesie - God protect her! - will starve to death and her children too. The chemist won't give her any more medicine on credit. Here am I, beating my brains out trying to compose a fourth letter, and my very own wife must come and pester the life out of me for the sum of fifty kopeks!" Love-letters, on the other hand, were a much more profitable undertaking. The lovers paid cash and at once. But only rarely did one order a letter "in the grand style", which meant with descriptions of nature, references to the moon and the stars, quotations from the Song of Songs and Pushkin and Schiller, and marginal decorations in colour. For such a work of art my father received seventy-five kopeks. He would have done it for less, even for nothing, but my mother watched out for this and insisted that he charge the full fee. A clever woman! I do not know if they are both still alive. It is nearly twenty years since last I saw them. Certainly my father will have already written his famous fourth letter to me, but he won't have been able to post it since he has no address. He sold almost everything he possessed in order that he might send his eldest son to the Petersburg Conservatoire. Then the revolution came and his son vanished. A golden boy he was, and then - gone, disappeared! Yankel the bookbinder had no luck with his eldest boy, Misha the musician. Never a word from him since 1920, never a single zloty - nothing! Vanished as though he had never existed! Not even his flute did he leave behind him.

'If you like I'll write a letter for you. You could dictate it, like Léon.'

'Thanks! A man who's vanished thinks twice before reappearing again. Besides, what do I care about Yankel the bookbinder? Give me two bits of chocolate now and I won't ask for any tomorrow.'

It was only when it was dark and he could not see his companion that Misha would talk. Invariably it was a monologue. Doino accustomed himself to sleeping by day and listening by night. Seldom would he interrupt Misha with a question. In any case, the man did not usually pay any attention to Doino but simply went on with his own train of thought. If he spoke of himself it was only in relation to others; in all the incidents which he described he was himself merely a secondary figure. Even in describing the attempt to assassinate him – it was on the Ukrainian front, where he had been political commissar in a division of which he had been compelled to assume command since all the officers were from the old Tsarist army – his own attitude and behaviour remained vague. The grenade had fallen at his feet but had not exploded. He had picked it up and tossed it back through the window of the cottage where the officers were assembled. After the explosion he ordered a detachment of reliable Red Army men to surround the cottage while he went in. A major's chest had been torn apart and his corpse lay sprawled beside the table; a lieutenant-colonel had been wounded in the chin and one ear. The young commissar walked up to the table and leaned over the military map that was there spread out. Only when he was quite certain that he could control his voice did he speak:

'We attack at dawn tomorrow. We shall capture the town and the coal-mines. We're short of ammunition, but we'll find more than enough in the mines. Should we lose this battle every one of you will begrudge the major his easy, pleasant death.'

They had won the battle before even the heat of the day began.

All Litvak's stories pointed to this one conclusion: that there can be no true contact between human beings. The actions of other men may be known, but their intentions are never really understood. In any case, even if these latter should be comprehensible, the observer's knowledge is hardly increased thereby, since there is very rarely any connection between motive, action and result; when the three do accord it is simply a coincidence, curious but quite meaningless. Litvak always, in his monologues, showed men in action – in attack, in preparation, or in flight – never in suspense or in hope or in fear. Only once did he refer to his break with the Party, his escape from Russia and his fall. He was describing a meeting at which the fate of a man who had for many years been his closest friend was being decided. Litvak, who should have intervened on his behalf, had instead spoken against him; by so doing he had ruined his friend and saved himself.

'That was on June 23rd, 1935. On this same day I left my car and chauffeur in Moscow – the car had something wrong with it – and

took the train home. Thus I arrived later than was my custom. My child was waiting for me on the little hillock by the bend in the road. When Yevgeni saw me coming he gave a whoop of joy and ran down to meet me. A heavy lorry, coming at full speed around the bend, could not brake in time. Yevgeni had celebrated his fourth birthday a week earlier.'

With his death it was all finished. For about a month Litvak went on as before, but now it was all pretence, shadows without substance, whether it was his friend's suicide in the prison, or his own lectures at the War Academy, or the articles which he published against his dead friend. His official visit abroad, too, was a series of meaningless, hollow gestures up to the point when, on the return journey, the train stopped accidentally, late at night, at a small, deserted, Polish station, and Sergei Riboff stepped out into the dark. Sergei had survived Yevgeni for seven weeks, which was too long.

Litvak's lust for sweets seemed insatiable. Within a few days he had eaten all the chocolates and all the acid drops. Bernard was frequently on guard, and he would willingly have bought more but none of the three had any money. Léon lent Doïno ten francs, but refused him a further loan. He was waiting in vain for a small remittance from his wife, and Doïno could not write her another letter on his behalf since there was not enough light in the hut. Bernard's letters produced no effect.

Litvak said:

'I sold my fountain pen as soon as I arrived here. We could get some money for yours. You'd better tell Bernard to sell it right away or else we'll soon have nothing to smoke. Anyhow, you can't write any more. Or tell your friends to send you money and parcels. I didn't ask you to look after me, but since you've forced yourself on me you'd better do your duty.'

When Doïno laughed, he said:

'I don't like it when you laugh! Shut up!'

'And I don't like you to talk that way. Or to clench your fists like that. If you don't put your hands down right away I'll throw this pail of water at your head.'

'Thank God, at last! So you're just such another brute as me. Brutes don't need pens. You can sell yours.'

On the eleventh day of his arrest Doïno was taken before the captain. This officer warned him, in polite terms, against being friendly with Litvak, whom he described as both dangerous and worthless. Then

Dr Meunier entered the room. The officer left them alone together after promising that he would fetch them both for luncheon.

'You don't look as badly as I had feared,' said the doctor. 'It won't take you long to recover once we get you to Paris. We leave tomorrow morning. Your papers are being put in order now and you start your new job at the beginning of next week. Your achievements as an infantryman will, I fear, always be of a low order; but in the propaganda field you can do a great deal for this country and our cause.'

'I'm sorry to be ungrateful and to disappoint you – but I'd rather stay here as a normal infantryman with no responsibilities. You should know, Doctor, how ineffective French propaganda is, even though there's a first-rate writer in charge of it. It can't be anything but ineffective since it is supposed to replace action instead of accompanying and explaining it. Demoralising and useless though my life here is, I still prefer it to the phoney enthusiasm of obituarists.'

'I don't know,' said Meunier thoughtfully. 'It may all change. It's still too early to pass judgment. In any case your situation here is quite impossible. It would be plain folly to let you stay. If Stetten were here instead of me and saw you as you are – in that hideous, filthy uniform, emaciated, unshaven and obviously, visibly unhappy – he'd move heaven and earth to get you out. And if it were he, you'd go with him. But as for me, what can I do for you?'

'I want two pounds of chocolate and two pounds of acid drops for the comrade I share a cell with.'

'It would be quite simple to get you a discharge on medical grounds. You'd live in my house and write. I'd pay you a fixed monthly sum, as though I were your publisher. You could then send your strange friend – who, they assure me incidentally, is a thoroughly suspicious character – more chocolate than he could eat. Don't answer right away, think my proposition over. We shall lunch with the captain and that rather over-zealous young man called Crillon, and after lunch we'll drive to Lyons. There you can lead a normal life for forty-eight hours and make up your mind in peace and quiet.'

At table Crillon said:

'The idiots think they can fool us. But we now know exactly who this Litvak fellow really is. His actual name is Maurycius Bytvyk, born at Lodz, Poland, 1908, studied at Montpellier and gaoled for Communist activities in 1935. He was deported and re-entered the country illegally. He got hold of false papers according to which his name is Misha Litvak, born in a village near Vilna in 1896. He pretends he first arrived in France in November, 1939.'

'It doesn't seem very smart of him to pretend he's forty-five if he's really only thirty-two. It's a big difference and sure to give him away eventually,' said Meunier. He glanced at Doino who had not opened his mouth except to eat throughout the meal.

'Exactly!' cried Crillon. 'That's exactly where the idiot made his mistake. Because he really does look a lot more than thirty-two.'

'No, that doesn't make sense,' said the captain. 'On the contrary, if he looks forty-five we can only assume that his papers are not, in fact, forged.' He turned to Doino: 'What's your opinion?'

'Litvak is the man he says he is. Until the beginning of the war he worked as assistant book-keeper in a saw-mill.'

'And did you know that he's also supposed to play the flute?' There was a definite note of triumph in Crillon's voice. 'Whoever heard of an assistant book-keeper playing the flute? He can hardly expect us to swallow that one!'

'The two are not absolutely incompatible,' replied Doino. 'Even a simple soldier like me can easily see that Litvak would be unlikely to play his flute while he was actually paying the mill-hands their weekly wages; alternatively, when playing his flute, in the evenings say, he would probably not attempt simultaneously to balance the firm's books. Furthermore, he may not have limited his activities strictly to those two fields. For example, he might have practised rifle-shooting as well, or perhaps even paid court to some young peasant girl.'

Meunier interrupted him:

'Be that as it may, gentlemen, there can be no question of Litvak being a man called Bytvyk thirteen years his junior. You should accept the judgment of my friend Faber.'

'It's a confusing case,' said the captain as he passed them the bowl of fruit. 'If Faber would agree to tell us everything he knows about the fellow . . .'

'He's a well-disciplined soldier who objects to being insulted by his superiors and will on no account tolerate that they strike him.'

'It was all a mistake. Lieutenant Crillon didn't intend to strike him,' said the company commander. 'You know perfectly well, Faber, that here we don't strike the men. A good soldier shouldn't be so sensitive. Our job is to toughen the men up. And besides, any Pole should feel proud to be allowed to serve in the finest army in the world.'

Meunier was afraid that Doino would give the captain a withering reply, but he said nothing. Soon afterwards they left the table.

Two days later the doctor drove him back to the village.

'I'm not sure, Faber, that I quite grasp your reasons. I don't think I entirely understand you.'

'You'll understand me better in a few weeks or perhaps months. Then you'll see that bad though the place is which I've chosen, it's still the best spot to be. Here at least I can be cured of my particular form of megalomania, which makes me suffer on account of everything that happens as though I were personally responsible. A few more months of the cure and I'll be able to face all coming events with the stolidity of a stupid peasant caught in the rain.'

'That is something you'll never achieve, my friend. You once told me that in certain circumstances ingenuousness is only another name for a cowardly flight from that perceptiveness which can force a man to accept responsibility. A man who has once realised this can never again successfully find refuge in ingenuousness.'

'You still don't know, Doctor, how far it is possible to fall.'

'I'd rather not know. And there you are again with this ingenuousness of yours! Now, what am I to tell Madame Le Roy? She will be telephoning me tomorrow morning, and I promised her that I would take back a message.'

'Tell her that you failed to find me. And that there is no longer any point in continuing the search. Tell her that it will never snow red roses.'

They shook hands, but neither of them could find any farewell words to say.

Mcunier followed him with his eyes as he walked away down the village street, and he felt that he had suffered the greatest defeat of his life. The fact that he had not persuaded Faber to accept help gave him a feeling of helplessness identical to his sensations when he was awakened in the middle of the night by his fear of dying.

The chauffeur helped him back into the car and spread a rug over his knees.

'Drive slowly. It makes no difference whether we get to Paris tomorrow or the day after. We have more time than we need.'

CHAPTER II

NEVER had they known a more brilliantly beautiful early summer. It was all perfectly proportioned: the heat of the day, the brief showers at night, the green of the fields, the richness of the foliage, the blue of the sky and the exquisitely white clouds. All nature seemed to have reached that age at which life should be immortalised: everything was young and yet mature – everything except man.

It was defeat. They tried to find the proper word: disaster, collapse, dissolution, but none was apposite, none was sufficiently strong. It was an event without parallel, and therefore parallels were sought in remote myths and distant metaphors. A minute ago, so ran one such metaphor, he was standing upright in the sunshine, young, vigorous, as certain of the coming day as he was of his own strength; and now there he lay, felled by a single blow. Thus died Achilles; such was the end of Siegfried; there were many more examples. The only terrible innovation in this case was that with each breath the dying hero aged an eternity: the skin of his face turned to parchment, his flesh putrified and fell away, his bones began to rot before even the life was out of his body. His youth had been just pretence, the brilliance of his strength nothing but a lie.

And this defeat, as incredible and incomprehensible as an evil spell, was simultaneously as certain and as unbelievable as one's own death.

Litvak remarked in a tone of indifference:

'A disaster on this scale cannot be accounted for simply on grounds of material inferiority. Weapons kill but only men conquer. And men are only defeated when they accept defeat. It is possible to eliminate a battalion or a regiment simply by possessing better weapons than your enemy's. But a nation is not conquered in that way; a national collapse is primarily a moral phenomenon. Take the Battle of the Marne, for instance. It was certainly not as important as it has been made out; it was a useful, tactical success, achieved at exactly the right moment. Its strategic significance was, in fact, small, but its psychological results were decisive. From then on the French made up their minds that any battle lost was only the penultimate one.

'An army corps can be truly described as encircled and cut off only if it happens to be on an island in the middle of a river. Otherwise it's just a phrase, an excuse. A man who wants to win is not really defeated

until he is dead, and not a minute before. This time France has accepted the first defeat as though it were the last. Whole armies are cut off, encircled, surrounded.'

'Generalisations should be written down on paper, where they can be checked against the facts. Spoken ones make a disagreeable impression and arouse distrust. You may be right, Litvak, but never the less it's well known that defeat is always inexplicable to the defeated, whereas to the conquerors their victory seems natural and well deserved. That may sound like a maxim. In fact it's nothing but an obvious platitude.'

Antonio made an elegant, almost apologetic gesture as he said this. He began to walk faster. It was amazing how active he was, for he was a heavily-built man, 'undeservedly fat', he said. He was a thin young man when they arrested him; five years later, when he was released from the Lipari Islands, he was nothing but skin and bones, and he was turning grey. He had managed to cross the border into France. There, though his life had been a hard one, he had begun to grow fat. Everything he ate, he explained, helped to blow him up like a balloon. Antonio was a man of elegant mannerisms, of ironic attitudes, of a precision of speech which was almost a caricature. An upright and honest socialist, he was prepared to make many sacrifices for his beliefs. He was also, and very definitely, the proud representative of that patrician Florentine family whose last, lost son he was. Besides that he upheld in well chosen words the virtues of Tuscany, Italy, Mediterranean civilisation, and the left wing of the illegal movement called *Giustizia e Libertà*.

He walked at the head of the twenty-five soldiers who had been on the march now for four days and four nights. The brigade, surrounded by enemy panzer forces, hemmed in until all further resistance was useless, would have to surrender – such at least was the explanation given by the battalion commander in the preamble to his final orders. These orders dealt with the proper way for prisoners of war to behave.

The next night this little group had broken out. The undertaking appeared extremely bold if not actually hopeless. Yet it was so easy that they had difficulty in believing that they had succeeded. Litvak led them. To begin with the soldiers had found it incredible that Litvak should thus assume command. A few hours later they realised that only he could have brought them out of the danger zone. Soon they had forgotten the earlier picture which they had formed of him. They obeyed his orders without hesitation.

Most of them had been in prison or in concentration camps. They had lost their homes, and many had left the Party which had been a second,

more important home to them. It might have been said of them that they had nothing more to lose but their lives. Yet it was an automatic response that made them now risk those lives in order to avoid capture. By nature they were incapable of surrendering; besides, their past experience made it utterly impossible.

'You're wrong, Antonio,' said Litvak. 'Look at this skeleton beside me here, this bag of bones called Faber that looks as if it were on its way to the psalmist's green pastures and still waters. Faber has always been on the side of the defeated. For decades now he's lived in a constant atmosphere of defeat, but never till now has he attempted even once to visualise the possibility of really being conquered. Since our last halt he's been silent. Undoubtedly he's working out a theory to prove that this disaster is the necessary preliminary to our future and, of course, decisive victory. Tell the truth, Faber!'

'The truth is that the pastures here are as green as——'

'Don't sidestep the question. You weren't thinking about pastures.'

'I was. And about the still waters. And about the people all over the world who are anxiously wondering about us. Our death will have more than just a sentimental meaning for them. Even now, already, they know that they must be our successors, that they must follow in our footsteps. I feel sorry for them.'

Antonio laughed:

'That's an original idea at any rate: the dying carving the tombstones for the survivors.'

Jeannot did not immediately understand, but then he laughed loudly. They all loved his gaiety. He was the youngest, just nineteen years old. For three years he had been moving on, ever since the night his father woke him and whispered that the fascists had taken away his elder brother whom they had already certainly shot. The younger boy was also in danger. He must leave his home and his town at once and somehow make his way through to the other side. The boy did as his father told him, though he would rather have stayed at home; he was neither a republican nor a phalangist, and he had no wish to fight or to kill or to die. But he must leave at once, sleepy as he was. He got through. In Albacete they made him a soldier, but they did not send him to the front. Everywhere there were men and women anxious to look after him, to see that he was given enough to eat, to keep him from danger. He asked for nothing and he never turned to anybody for help. He was a slender boy of medium height with soft, slow gestures. His large eyes gazed calmly out at all the world. They were the only remarkable feature in a face that expressed neither suffering nor curiosity nor

astonishment. Yet anyone who saw him was, for a while, pensive and moved.

Juan, who was called Jeannot, crossed into France with the last remnants of the Republican Army. He was interned in a camp whose inmates were of violent differing political views. He took no part in their quarrels. When volunteers were wanted for a working-party he was always ready. The food was insufficient and bad, the treatment they received humiliating. There was a mutiny and he was among those who were imprisoned; later he was brought back to the camp. When the war started and volunteers were wanted for the French Army he put his name down. He was a good soldier.

Some of his comrades and some of the N.C.O's loathed him. They could not stand his laughter, his easy walk, his slow speech. But the others protected him, even fought for him. They were grateful to him, for he evoked in them a deep and selfless emotion of which they would not have believed themselves capable, and to which they could not have even given a name: it was like a protective love for a younger brother, and it was the finest feeling that they were allowed here in this lonely crowd, far from wife and children and friends.

The men talked a great deal about women in a standardised obscene manner which was a mixture of unsatisfied desire, timid admiration, and boastful contempt. In every village, in every house they looked for sexual adventure. They seldom found it, for even the ugliest women like to be wooed. The pay was so wretched and they were so poor that only a few could afford the brothel. So they were proud that Jeannot found a girl to love him wherever they were. The women ran after him and he accepted their embraces in the same way that he accepted his comrades' presents. When, late at night, he came back to the barn where they were billeted he generally brought them something good that a girl had given him. He would offer it all round – a cake or cheese or bacon – and then he would lie down on the straw and fall asleep at once.

He had become particularly friendly with Bernard, whose songs he liked. He was always ready to listen; perhaps Bernard's psalms reminded him somehow of the flamenco songs of his home. He would ask Bernard for advice or for his opinion on practical matters. He would tell him nostalgically about his home, his father, his mother, and his friends, far away in Spain. But when he was in a more serious mood he would go to Litvak or to Faber, whom he had nicknamed 'Don Doino'.

'Since they haven't killed us yet, we'll get through all right again,' said Jeannot. 'For two days now we haven't seen a stuka. Since yester-

day we haven't even been machine-gunned by fighters. Don Doino, you will surely live for ever. And one day you'll come to stay with us in Granada. You'll love Spain and you'll never go away again. That's what I think.'

Yes, it was good to have this boy with them now.

Frequently it occurred to one or other of them that this march of theirs resembled a school outing. They had lost the teacher - had left him drunk, perhaps, at the inn or tumbling the landlord's daughter in the hay. They had not spoken to an officer for days. During daylight hours they went through the woods; at night they returned to the roads. Then sometimes they would see cars full of officers which dashed past on the way south. They could scarcely have said where it was that they had left their brigade. They did not care. It was all over except for their own lives and the lives of their families.

On the fifth day the little group reached the fringe of the vast stream of fleeing civilians and of smashed military units pouring back in lorries. The roads were entirely covered with vehicles which could only advance a few yards at a time. Again and again the whole procession would be stopped while a car which had broken down was thrown off the road; sometimes this took several minutes.

Evening was falling when the enemy fighter planes appeared. It was too easy for them. They came down low and flew along the road for a few hundred yards, one behind the other, machine-gunning the fugitives. There were shouts, screams and groans. Some were wounded, others dead. A car burst into flames. There was a panic rush into the fields, and the last couple of planes aimed at the people stumbling through the corn. In two minutes it was all over. The fighters soared proudly up into the blue heavens, which must surely belong to them, as the earth belonged to them and all that crawled upon the earth. Soon they looked like a flock of migrating birds.

Two men of the group had been hit. A bullet had grazed the shoulder of one; it was not a serious wound, and the others soon bound it up. Then they put him in the car of an elderly couple who willingly took him with them.

The other man was dead. They buried him beside the river. He had been a silent individual with no friends, and they knew almost nothing about him. Sergeant Berthier took his papers.

They got away from the road by forced marches and did not rest until the next morning, when they lay down in a little wood that was filled with nesting birds. Here they spent the whole day, sleeping and

looking after their feet, for they were torn and blistered so that they ached like open wounds.

Berthier was the worst sufferer. He was a small, thick-set man of forty, and he found the long marching very difficult. He never really grumbled and he enjoyed making jokes against himself. It was thanks to him that they managed to eat at least once a day. He found food in the most unlikely places, and he always saw to it that it was fairly divided. Whenever he threatened not to go on, the others, too, would stop and they would have an extra halt. If he was really down and seriously intended giving up, all they had to do was to start him talking about his children. He loved them to a quite astonishing degree, and he spoke of them in a way that usually only widows use when talking about their only child. Thus would he gain renewed confidence. Out would come once again the little bundle of photographs, the boy of twelve, the girl of ten, and the little three-year-old, all in their Sunday best. They were not pretty children, though the father always referred to their beauty. He never mentioned their mother.

Now the sergeant lay there, his feet a bleeding mass of raw flesh. This time, he said, he would really have to give up. But then he struggled to his feet and went off, with four other men, in search of food. They had no money and therefore had to beg everything from the peasants or, in case of need, requisition what they wanted. It was not always easy. The rank of sergeant was not an impressive one. Berthier preferred to rely on the fact that in civilian life he had been the mayor of a village of two thousand three hundred and fifty souls, and this did, quite often, produce the desired effect. When all argument failed they had to 'knock off' what they could; the men who had fought in Spain referred to this as 'organising' a meal. In principle the sergeant disapproved of such methods, but he realised that necessity knows no laws, that hunger overrides all other considerations.

He was by trade a mason or, as he preferred to put it, a building contractor. Had there been no war he would have been a candidate for election to the general council of his *département*, and would probably have won a seat. There was still a chance, if he managed to reach home now, that he'd get another opportunity of winning the coveted position in the near future. Of them all he alone had no doubts about the sense of social institutions, and no catastrophe could shake his certainty. Berthier might visualise his country without an army or a government, and even, with an effort, his *département* without a prefect; but never for a second could he envisage one of the countless French parishes being without a mayor and a council.

This time all they brought back was a sack of potatoes and a little bread. The village was very small and very poor. But it was not for that reason that they were so unhappy. They had learned in the village that Paris had been declared an open city and had been occupied by the enemy. They all received this news like a frightful, unspeakably humiliating blow. After a while Berthier said:

'Why are you so sad, Faber? If I'd been mayor of Paris I'd have insisted that they declare it an open city. Anyhow, what does it mean when they talk about occupying a city like that? It's not possible.'

Léon nodded his agreement, and since Faber did not reply, added:

'Of course not! Nobody could occupy Paris. Suppose the Germans send in a hundred thousand soldiers. So what? There's millions and millions of people in Paris. The foreign soldiers will get scared, they'll slip out of Paris like a thief in the night. You can't fool about with Paris, I can tell you that.'

Litvak was lying beside them. He pretended to be asleep, but actually he was listening with interest to Antonio's detailed description of the Sack of Rome.

A little further away were the three Polish miners. As usual when they were hungry they were discussing a buried treasure chest in Spain, which they planned to dig up in time to come.

At the edge of the wood Jeannot and Bernard were mounting guard – like Sancho Panzo and Don Quixote's nephew, Faber thought as he glanced their way. Leaning on the muzzle of his rifle, Bernard rubbed his bare feet alternately against the butt. From time to time he would bite off a hunk of bread; he had the vacant expression of an ox chewing the cud. He was timid and cowardly when alone, but calm and brave when he knew that there were friends at his back. In any case, he was certain that this time Faber and the others were wrong. In his opinion the Germans had fallen straight into a trap.

He explained it all to Jeannot:

'And even if they've realised it, it's too late now. You see, the French generals they're not like ordinary officers who don't know how to do anything except just strut around the place giving orders. They're intelligent, educated men, some of them are even writers. Listen, did you know there's quite a few French generals even get into the *Académie Française*? So you just wait and see, Jeannot! They're letting the Germans dash on until their tongues are hanging out – and why not? The Germans will imagine they're a regular bunch of Nebuchadnezzars, winning a great victory. And then what do the French generals do? They order a right-about turn and they attack! The German tanks?

Nothing but a joke by then. They can't go on and they can't go back because of being out of gas by that time! The infantry? In a foreign country, out of ammo, out of grub, the soles dropping off their boots! Then the French start chasing them, boum! Back you go, little Germans, back home with you! Yes, *but* . . . What's behind them? The French armies! Maybe you think the French armies are encircled. But who's encircled? The French? Don't make me laugh! The French are at home and you can't be encircled in your own home. You listen to me, Jeannot: Faber's wrong and Litvak's wrong. Tomorrow, day after tomorrow at the latest, the fighting will start again. I hope I have as many good years, and you too, as the French have Napoleons in their army. I tell you it's going to be good, very, very good. How would you mind smoking Turkish cigarettes, the very finest tobacco, and as many as ever you want, one after the other? We'll have them! We'll take them away from the German officers. Now just you have a look through your pockets and see if maybe you've got a little bit of tobacco. I've got a cigarette paper.'

Jeannot said:

'If they've given up Paris it means they won't fight. We've lost the war, Bernard. I don't think we'll be smoking your Turkish cigarettes, Bernard, and I've got absolutely no tobacco left.'

'Lost?' repeated Bernard angrily. 'France lost? I won't listen to that sort of rubbish. In these last weeks you've had a chance to see a bit of France. Can you imagine a blessed land like this being lost? And how about Roosevelt? What'll he do? Go on playing bridge and keeping his trap shut? You think so? And then he'll go home and say to his wife, who's making the bed: "Oi! oi! poor France," and then just lie down and go to sleep . . . and that's all? You think that, Jeannot?'

'Why not? That's what happened to Spain.'

'How can you compare Spain and France? Did Spain ever produce a Zola who said "*J'accuse!*" so that the world listened? Did Spain ever have a giant like Voltaire who said "*Ecrasez l'infame*"? Did it? Did Spain ever have fine, noble men who said, "All men are equal"? And how about Pasteur? Wasn't he something too? Have you got lots of Pasteurs down there in Spain?'

'They put me in two camps here. There wasn't much talk there about your Pasteur, but . . .'

Bernard would not let him finish.

'Any nations can have camps, the smallest and stupidest country can build them - why not? Once you've got a police force camps are easy. Persecuting innocent men is easy. Since the beginning of the world, are

you listening, Jeannot? since the beginning of time innocent people have been persecuted. That's common practice. But, you see, what's noble in men, that's what's rare. And that's why I tell you Hitler can't win and won't win. Take Titus, for instance. He thought he'd won. But a little fly crept into his ear and ate its way through to his brain. Can you imagine what his life was like, your great conqueror Titus? Or – I don't want to hurt your feelings – but take Spain. They kicked us out, the Spaniards did – an easy trick that, kicking out the Jews. And ever since then Spain has been going down and down and down. They didn't fancy fine men like Yehuda Halévy or Uriel d'Acosta or Baruch Spinoza, but a fellow like that General Franco, they fancy him all right, he's a regular gem as far as they're concerned. I hope at least that you know what has been written in the Book: "Man is formed in God's image." Well, do you still imagine Hitler could possibly win? It's a shame to let such nonsense pass your lips. And now go and ask Faber for a pinch of tobacco. Don't tell him I said he's wrong. He's already upset on account of Paris, and I don't want to get him more upset because of me. In two days at the most the big change will come. Then you'll see that Bernard was right after all.'

The next day they heard that Marshal Pétain had asked for an armistice. In a much repeated broadcast he told the French people: 'I tell you, the fighting must be brought to an end'.

They formed a circle around Litvak. He said:

'An officer who makes such a statement openly, before the armistice has been signed, is capable of doing anything and will probably do the worst. It may be that he's already agreed that we're all to be treated as prisoners. Any man who would be willing to accept being made prisoner must leave our group at once. The rest of us will stay in the woods until we know for sure what's going on.'

One man said:

'Everyone should try and change into civilian clothes.'

'There's more than one danger threatening us,' said Faber. 'Particularly those of us who are "politicals", because if the Germans don't catch us we could be shot as deserters if we put on civilian clothes. Therefore I say neither be taken prisoner, nor desert till we know what's happening! Only those comrades who prefer death to imprisonment should stay with us.'

There was silence, finally broken by a young man who, despite his attempts at mystification, was known to them all as leader of the Communist faction of five who were still loyal to the Party. He took up his stance in the middle of the circle and began, somewhat loudly:

'This collapse merely goes to show that we were right all along. The French Government declared war against Hitler on the orders of the City of London and refused the sincere peace-offers which Stalin supported. Why? Because the Communist movement had grown too strong! War made it possible for the government to ban our Party and persecute us. Now the monopoly-capitalists think they've achieved their ends. That's why they're ready to stop the farce and surrender. The English lords have long had a secret agreement with Hitler and tomorrow we'll hear that they've decided to share in exploiting the colonial peoples and to crush the native populations. It's all a filthy trick of the monopoly-capitalists, with the gentry in Wall Street behind it all. But those people are not quite so smart as they think. They gambled on Hitler attacking Russia but, thanks to the political genius of Stalin, friendship between the Russian and German peoples is firmly established, and also thanks to Stalin's genius Hitler's Germany will gradually become socialist. So much for the general situation, Comrades. Meanwhile we've no reason to be frightened of becoming prisoners of war. In any case, we'll only be in prison for a few days at most. We don't like Hitler, but we can feel brotherly solidarity with the German workers in uniform. When we meet them we mustn't shoot at them, we must fraternise with them.'

'Why then didn't you stay with the regiment?' Antonio asked. 'You'd have been fraternising with Hitler's soldiers days ago.'

'That's none of your business. I don't ask you why you came with us.'

'No more talk and no more argument. Leave here at once,' Litvak said. 'And anyone who agrees with you should go with you.'

'We shall do as we please. First I intend to explain our point of view clearly. Our time has come.'

'No, Golomb. If you're still here in five minutes' time, or still in sight in ten, I'll treat you as the enemy.' Litvak's voice was quite calm, but the hand in which he held the grenade trembled. 'All those who are with me, get behind me. Berthier, give me your revolver.'

Faber moved across so that he was standing beside him. He took the grenade from Litvak's hand.

'You're a counter-revolutionary lunatic,' shouted Golomb. 'You're threatening your comrades.'

'Hitler's not my comrade, and neither is Pétain. I don't fraternise with fraternisers, I shoot them,' Litvak replied. 'Faber, count off the minutes. I give you five and no more. Antonio, take their rifles away from them. Search Golomb. He's got a revolver.'

Golomb and eight other men left. Fourteen remained, and they decided to rest until evening. That afternoon the nine came back. They brought stupendous news from the nearby town: at dawn that day the Red Army had launched its attack; Russian parachutists were already at the gates of Warsaw; since early morning the Red Air Force had been dropping incendiary bombs on Berlin and Breslau, and both cities were in flames.

'Now it's really started!' Golomb triumphantly informed Faber. 'The war against Hitler has begun at last! It's time to settle with him and his pals once and for all!'

The five members of his faction were very happy to be allowed to be anti-fascists once again. It was true that they did not yet know the official Party line, but since the Russians had attacked it was not hard to assume that they must now be in favour of the war and must stop being 'peace-lovers'.

Litvak said:

'The news is false. It is unlikely that Hitler would attack Russia while his armies are in France. And as for Stalin, though he's always killed men who were already on their deathbed, he's never attacked a conqueror.'

'It wouldn't be such a bad idea for him to attack Germany at the precise moment when the bulk of Hitler's troops are engaged in the West,' said Faber. 'But Litvak's right, it's not Stalin's style. He'll exploit the situation by occupying Reval, but not Koenigsberg or Cracow.'

Golomb answered loudly:

'Your hatred for the proletariat makes you silly. You refuse to face the facts.'

'And tomorrow, when you learn the news is false, what will you say then?' Litvak asked sarcastically. 'Won't the war immediately become an imperialist war again, Golomb?'

'Trotzkyist trick-questions!' replied Golomb. 'We five are going back to the town in any case. It will soon be time to start advancing against the enemy.'

They all went to the village. It was filled with soldiers who were hopefully excited by the news. After midnight came the disillusionment. Suddenly and simultaneously they all knew that the story was a false one, probably put about by the Germans in order to increase the general confusion.

Litvak's group marched off. They had wasted several hours and now they must hurry to make up for lost time.

'You're quite right,' said Litvak, 'I don't eat chocolate any more. Not

only pissed enough but eaten enough chocolate too. A few more final chords: the lights are already being dimmed and the musicians are beginning to pack up their instruments. You must get through to Portugal and from there make your way to England or America. To England if Churchill stays at the head of the Government and manages to hold on till October.'

'We'll go together,' said Faber.

'No, I'll stop here. This campaign seems to me to provide a suitable end to my career. I shall enjoy dying in the midst of the parody. I've known for a long time what the actors look like when they take off their grease-paint. You must go to Portugal. The French will hand over people of your sort to the Germans, or maybe the Russians. . . .'

'No, they'd never do a thing like that.'

'Don't talk as though you were a fool or didn't know what's going on. A man who has committed a criminal action is not necessarily bound by his crime. Or should he be so bound, he can at any time shake off those bonds. But a man who acts contemptibly and furthermore insists that his contemptibility is a virtue, such a man must go on sinking lower and lower. You knew that once, and that's why you left the Party. Now you must leave this country, this continent – because here there will be committed crimes of an immensity of which only contemptible men and contemptible nations are capable.'

'Then why won't you go too?'

Litvak did not reply.

Later Doyno realised that Litvak had, during the course of that night, become certain that his end was near, and that he now wished to die very soon. But it was not possible that he could have foreseen, let alone planned, the nature and circumstances of his death.

It was June 19th, about three o'clock in the afternoon. They had chosen a little thicket as their resting-place, near the road, above a curve.

They were all exhausted, with that exhaustion which is simultaneously a physical ache and a great heaviness of spirit. They had been marching now for eleven days and nights. At any moment this country, for which they had been prepared to die, might become enemy soil. They had eaten too little and slept too little and they had no more tobacco or cigarettes. Their boots were disintegrating and marching grew more and more difficult. Many a man asked himself whether there was any sense whatever in going on – were they not just wearing themselves out for nothing, like a trapped mouse running round and round inside a cage?

On the far side of the hillock there must be a village. Berthier and Faber struggled to their feet and set off in search of provisions. If they could eat they would gain fresh courage.

Jeannot collected the water-bottles and went in search of a stream. The others remained stretched out where they were, their bare feet in the grass, their heads in the shade cast by the bushes. In silence they awaited the return of their comrades. In front of them the dusty white road climbed sharply to the right; to the left it sloped gently down to another curve some four hundred yards away. The place was well chosen, for they had a clear field of vision to either side.

A two-wheeled cart trundled slowly up the road. An old peasant woman dozed on the box and only awoke when the horse stopped to crop the grass on the verge. The cart was filled with empty baskets.

Later a peasant came by with a scythe over his shoulder. He could give them neither cigarettes nor tobacco; he did not smoke.

Suddenly they heard the sound of an engine. They watched from the cover of the bushes while a German motor cycle with side-car came down the road towards them, a cloud of dust rising behind it.

Litvak, lying on his stomach, pulled the sack of grenades towards him. He was watching the curve immediately below. At that moment Jeannot appeared. He lifted two water-bottles in the air and banged them rhythmically together. They made a noise like cow-bells. Litvak shouted:

'Jeannot, look out!'

The motor cycle combination came around the corner. Jeannot seemed not to see it, though he must surely have heard it. He was still standing in the middle of the road making the noise like cow-bells. The motor cycle stopped at once and the soldier in the side-car raised his machine pistol. Litvak cried:

'Jeannot! Jeannot!'

Simultaneously they heard the rattle of the shots. The boy ran towards the edge of the road, but he collapsed before ever he reached it.

The first grenade did not explode. Litvak jumped down on to the road. As he landed he cried out with pain; he must have sprained his ankle. He immediately threw the second grenade, which exploded inside the side-car. He ran on, still shouting, and threw two more. The motor cycle was on fire and the driver had fallen from his seat.

The others stood in the bushes and watched Litvak as he ran hobbling down the road. He shouted all the time, but they could not understand his words. At last he had reached Jeannot. He picked him up and began to carry him back in his arms. Bernard was hurrying towards them, but

just before he reached them two more motor cycles appeared around the bend. In a second they formed line abreast and came racing down the slope, their machine-pistols firing. They stopped by the burning machine, picked up their dead comrades, and disappeared back into the cloud of dust.

Berthier and Faber had run back to join the others as soon as they heard the explosions. The three dead men lay in the thicket. Their faces and their hair were white with dust through which had trickled rivulets of blood. Léon stood beside Bernard's corpse and made no effort to control his sobs. For a time Doino could not take his eyes off Litvak's dusty, bloody feet. Then he saw the gap in his teeth, where he had lost three from frostbite during a campaign in the Russian civil war. Jeannot's cheeks were torn, but his mouth was undamaged. Doino thought that they must wash the dust from his lips, must wash all their faces.

They carried the three corpses up the hill and there they dug a grave.

Doino sat down beside the dead men. He put shoes on Litvak's feet and carefully tied the laces. He washed the dead men's faces. His hands lingered over their foreheads and their cheeks. The present had no meaning for him. Here was not here, now was no longer now. His sensations were fully alert; he heard the clink of the spades, he saw the flecks of sunlight on the leaves and on the ground between the little trees. But his feelings were elsewhere, as though all this were an event long past and accidentally recalled, something that had happened so many years ago that there was no need for him now to mourn, as though the deadening pain had itself been deadened.

Berthier laid the contents of the dead men's pockets beside Doino. There was the empty tin in which Bernard used to keep his cigarette butts, the little, black notebook and pencil and the family photographs which had been Jeannot's, Litvak's ocarina, now broken in three pieces. In Litvak's pockets they found not a single scrap of paper, no notebook, no photograph. They did not even find his spectacles.

They all mourned for the Spanish boy. The three Poles and Léon buried Bernard as gently as though he had been one of themselves. Doino alone grieved for Litvak. For the others he had remained strange to the last. Ridiculous at first, then uncanny and disturbing like a creature from some other world. The picture of the tall man running barefoot down the road, the gestures with which he threw the hand-grenades, these they would see again in their dreams. They would hear his incomprehensible cries. Already that other picture was growing dim: they were already forgetting how he had carried Jeannot in his arms.

They hesitated before filling in the grave. They were waiting for Faber to speak. But he remained seated where he was, as though the dead men still lay beside him. Berthier said:

'Before the earth covers them I should like to say a word. I am the only Frenchman here. We are burying three men who came from far away. They fought for France. They deserved to find a second home here in France. I don't want to make a speech, but this is true: we'll never forget them. Maybe this country has deserved its defeat. The men we are now burying had a right to victory.'

There were now only eleven of them. They determined to stay together and Antonio assumed command. He decided that they must not travel by day and that, for the time being at least, they must avoid roads even after dark.

Towards evening Berthier came over and sat down beside Doïno.

'I can't pretend there's anything special about Bezons. But still, why don't you come to Bezons with me? Then when they open the frontiers again you can go wherever you want.'

'What is your cemetery like?' Doïno asked.

Berthier looked at him thoughtfully before replying:

'Why do you ask that? Why must you think about death?'

'I wasn't asking for myself. Later you must try to have their three bodies moved to the cemetery at Bezons. Get in touch with Jeannot's parents. Perhaps they will want him to be brought back to Granada. On Litvak's tombstone you must have a second name carved: Sergei Liboff. It may be that in time to come many people will visit Bezons just to see his grave. Once upon a time his name was almost synonymous with hope. And whenever men begin to hope again they decipher on half-forgotten tombs the names of their new conviction. You shall inherit his flute. He carried it everywhere these last few months, but never once did he play it. It's a fine flute. Perhaps one of your children will learn.'

'You haven't said whether you'll come to Bezons with me.'

'Will you hide me from the police? They'll look for me in order to hand me over to the conquerors. You're the mayor. Will you be able to disobey the edicts of your government?'

'All France would rise as one man against any such edict. You should know what sort of people we are, Faber.'

'I know you as you have been up to now, and I believe I know what you will be like tomorrow. You will be astonished, Berthier, and bitterly disillusioned.' Litvak says: 'A man who lives in contempt no longer recoils from any crime.'

'What are you talking about?'

'About tomorrow and the day after tomorrow. Your country's collapse, Berthier, is only beginning now, at the very moment when you believe that it is complete. It will be very hard to be a good mayor of Bezons.'

The last days were the most difficult. The group broke up. Only four men, Antonio, Berthier, Faber and Léon, remained together. They let themselves be carried along with the great flood that was pouring south. When the armistice was signed they had reached the neighbourhood of Grenoble.

This was the first night for a long time that they could lie down in the certainty that they might sleep until morning. They found a high and fragrant haystack, with the star-studded sky above their heads. There was scarcely a sound to be heard.

'Aren't you asleep either?' Léon asked. 'You're a free man. What have you to worry about? I have a wife and two kids; and who knows where they are? And Jacquot, what will happen to little Jacquot now? The Germans won't let him study. Ever since the day he was born I've only had one ambition, that Jacquot should be a dentist. A dentist in France – have you ever thought what a wonderful life that would be? Do you think I'd have sweated the way I have just so as Jacquot could be a cheap little tailor like me? So what's the sense in life?'

'You should sleep, Léon. It's better to think about these things in the daylight.'

'France has lost the war, there's no future left for Jacquot, and he tells me I should sleep! Really, Faber, sometimes I almost think you've got no heart at all. Of course you may tell me somebody's got to lose the war, but why France? What's the justice of it? And if there's no justice any more, there's nothing left at all, nothing whatever. Are you listening to me? Do you hear me, Faber?'

'Go to sleep, Léon. Good night.'

'Hitler will tell me I've got to take a new name. He's afraid that if my papers just say I'm called Zalmen-Leib Yankelevicz without Israel for a middle name the people might think I was a younger brother of the Pope of Rome. All right, so I'll be called Israel. But do you know what he'll do? He'll loot the French, he'll hurt their feelings, he'll insult them, every day he'll show them who's the boss. And then what? The French aren't used to it, they don't know how hard life can be. They'll become cruel. Cruel to whom? To us! Faber, I can tell you this, Hitler will make the French turn rotten. The French have been a fine people

and they've said: "Live and let live!" But now Hitler won't let them live and they won't let us. What fault is it of my Jacquot's if the Germans go crazy all of a sudden and make a paperhanger their top man? What fault is it of the French? Answer me! You're an educated man, aren't you?

'Let me sleep.'

'What do you mean, sleep? Do you even know where you're sleeping? In France, you think? But if there isn't any France any more, where are you sleeping then? Nowhere! Berthier has told me about a French general who made a speech in London and said France has lost a battle but not the war. I tell you that general's not so stupid, because he's right. He must be right. Bernard always said that a man who knew how to read the Holy Book properly would understand that Hitler could never win this war. But what's to stop him winning if you just lie there and think about sleeping, if we don't do anything? I tell you, Faber, we must do something! I won't let you sleep until you give me an honest answer to just one question. One word will do. Do you believe my Jacquot will be a dentist in France? Yes or no?'

'Yes, Léon, yes.'

'You say yes, but I can see you don't believe it. Listen, Faber . . .'

Doino dug himself deeper into the hay. He wasn't listening. For the first time since he had begun to think it seemed to him that he might possibly become indifferent: indifferent to human beings, their hopes, their errors and their complaints. That way lay salvation, he thought, contemptible salvation.

Léon went on talking for a long time. He suddenly fell asleep in mid-sentence. The brief June night was nearly over. Gradually the outline of the mountains appeared; their grey-white peaks were like gigantic arms with which the indifferent mountains held up the sky.

So the sublimity of nature, too, was just indifference. Did that make nature contemptible? At this moment Doino envied every little pebble its good fortune in not being a man.

CHAPTER III

HE had neither a bed for the night nor the money to pay for one. They had been demobilised, he and the other foreign volunteers, very simply: in exchange for their uniform they were given a faded suit of working clothes, and their demobilisation papers stated that they were not entitled to a discharge bonus. A special decree would eventually rectify the fact that their existence had been forgotten when the general decree concerning the bonus was issued.

The first day of his new freedom was a useless waste of time – the great seaport was crowded with people of his sort, all anxious to leave the country at once. The sea was itself a promise of distant safety. There was not a great deal that needed to be obtained in order to cross it: certain papers, certain rubber stamps on those papers, money for the journey, and finally a passage on a ship.

‘The prospect is not too bad,’ declared a former German cabinet minister.

He never ceased running his trembling hand over his egg-bald, freckled skull. Perhaps he felt that every glistening drop of sweat might betray him, might draw the attention of the enemy’s agents.

‘Obviously,’ he went on, ‘the first thing to do is to get to Portugal. One shouldn’t need supernatural skill to manage that.’

‘What’s the first step?’ Doino asked.

He was grateful to the man for having recognised and spoken to him and now for giving him these tips. But at the same time he felt a growing antipathy for the ex-minister. This was really self-hatred, the anger caused by the gestures of a caged monkey which seem to mirror and mock one’s own.

‘Well, obviously the Portuguese won’t issue any entrance visas, but they will let you have a transit visa. That’s not too bad. It’s possible to buy a Chinese entry visa at a price. But the Chinese don’t want us to go to China, and they insist on your having at least a visa for some South American country. There are three ways of obtaining one of these, and the cost is approximately the same for all of them. So when you’ve got a South American and a Chinese visa you’re undoubtedly making progress.’

The ex-minister licked his lips. This, Doino thought, was an expression of triumph. He immediately agreed:

'Exactly! I, for instance, want to go to England and join the army. Once I get to Portugal I can surely make my way to London or at least to Gibraltar.'

His knowledgeable adviser raised his index finger as though to discourage this young hot-head from some useless rashness:

'It's easy to see that this is your first day in Marseilles. We've been here for two months now, ever since the collapse, so we've collected a certain amount of experience. Now then: South American, Chinese and Portuguese visas all in order, so far so good, but . . . how are you to get to Portugal? Through Spain, you think? Very well! The Spaniards are not so bad, at least not as bad as we expected them to be. They only keep you in gaol for a few weeks before letting you through. But of course you'll need a Spanish transit visa. They'll give you one. Excellent. However, they not unnaturally insist that before you may apply for a Spanish transit visa you must have a French exit visa. And that is unobtainable. Or, let us put it this way: *you* won't get one. It's logical in view of the fact that you are who you are and, what's more, that you intend to go to England and fight. But all that apart, even assuming that you could somehow possibly obtain an exit visa - have you any valid passport or other such travel document in which to put it? Am I making too bold an assumption if I dare to presume that you entirely lack such vital papers? And there can be no question of you, an ex-combatant, applying to the prefecture for a passport, no matter what reasons you may produce for wanting to go abroad. Apart from anything else, it is contrary to the stipulations of the armistice agreement.'

The minister's expression was triumphant once again. When Doïno laughed aloud he gave him a searching look and said:

'You laugh because you believe that your case is entirely hopeless. But there you're wrong. In the first place . . .'

The man now counted off on his fingers seven possible ways of leaving France, all quite feasible provided, of course, that one had exceptionally good contacts, above all with the Americans and the various American committees and, needless to say, plenty of money. Doïno's possessions consisted of two canvas sacks, the so-called musette-bags. In one were his toilet articles, two handkerchiefs, a pair of socks, a shirt, and a pair of underpants; in the other nine tins of food, either fish or cheap liver-sausage, the final ration-issue given to soldiers on demobilisation. In addition he had, in his pockets, eight cigarettes, a box of matches, and Stetten's ocarina.

'You keep on laughing. I can't think why. Haven't I made it quite plain to you that there are no grounds for pessimism?'

'Yes,' Doino agreed, getting up from the bench. 'As we used to say in Vienna during the First World War: the situation is desperate but not serious.'

A baker gave him a long loaf and half a litre of wine in exchange for a big tin of liver-sausage. He walked to the harbour, sat down on a bench and ate. It was his first meal that day and he had difficulty in swallowing the bread. He broke the loaf up and put the pieces in his musette-bag. Slowly he drank the sourish wine. There were only a few small boats in the harbour; a fishing smack was just coming in. Doino would willingly have gone on sitting here in order to avoid the encounters with acquaintances which were inevitable in this city, but he must carry his 'action' through to the end. He had decided to allow himself two days – if in that time he failed to arrange for his departure from France he would give up. He could go to Relly, who was living with her son in a village along the coast, or he could try to make his way illegally through Italy to Yugoslavia. Djoura, Mara and the baroness would certainly be awaiting him, but he did not for a moment seriously entertain the idea of going to either place.

At six o'clock sharp he entered the office of the shipping agent. He asked for Monsieur Martin, mentioning the name of his Cousin Marthe as he had been told to do. A young man said that it was not certain whether Monsieur Martin would be in again today, but if he had time he might wait. The best place would be on the far side of the street. Twenty minutes later Doino was seated opposite Monsieur Martin. He looked exactly the way an agent of the British Intelligence Service is imagined, on the Continent, to look. He spoke quite good French, and even succeeded in not pronouncing 'u' as 'oo'. Doino explained that he wished to go to England, and showed his military papers. He answered questions concerning his political past. Finally the man said that he was sorry but that he could do nothing for him. There was no way of getting people to England. He offered him some money. Doino glanced at the banknote – no, the allegorical lady did not really look at all like Gaby – and handed it back to him.

'I've forgotten, or perhaps I never knew, why it was that the indigenous inhabitants of your islands used to paint themselves blue. Do you happen to know?'

As Mr Martin simply stared at him, first in amazement, and then thoughtfully, Doino went on:

'Don't worry, it's not a code phrase. It's a serious question, though perhaps at the moment not one of extreme urgency. One doesn't

expect quick reactions from you British. But 'there was already an expression of disdain in your eyes before you even knew whether or not I would accept your money. If you were painted blue I might not have noticed it.'

He next went to the American committee. He was informed that the office was already closed, but there were people waiting in the corridors and on the stairs. Many recognised him and turned away. Others spoke to him and asked why he had only begun to try to leave the country now, eight whole weeks after the collapse. With what purpose had he dressed himself up in those extraordinary, shabby clothes? There was no need for him to answer their questions: they were all far too eager to tell him their own story.

Now it was evening. He sat down on the terrace of a big café, where the waiter agreed to give him a coffee and a *croissant*, together with two cigarettes and two newspapers (already read by someone else) in exchange for a box of sardines. Doino felt that he was being stared at, but he did not look up. However, it was no good; the woman came over and sat at his table. Her name, she told him quickly, was now Béranger, and she was a French citizen. She had made a marriage in form only with Monsieur Béranger in order to acquire French papers; then she had in fact lived with him as man and wife, but later their marriage had gone on the rocks, for reasons not worth mentioning, but which she nevertheless described at great length.

The last time he had seen her was seventeen years before, in Berlin. In those days she had always been in the company of the most talked about and fashionable people. Now she had a slovenly look. She was badly made-up, with untidy hair; there were ink-spots on her light dress and her fingers, and brown crumbs at the corners of her mouth. She had undoubtedly just been eating cakes and chocolate.

He imagined that she was either lying or deceiving herself, for she spoke as though they were old and close friends. She addressed him in the second person singular, which he was certain she had never done in Berlin.

She was engaged to be married, she told him. The man was a chemist, in America. He was arranging her visa and passage and could hardly wait for her to join him. Now she had met a young composer here in Marseilles who had fallen in love with her. Would it be right for her to return his love? If she did, could she still accept the visa from her fiancé? Could she ask him to arrange a second visa for the musician?

'That's always been my fate, to be torn between two men. You remember in the old days, when you wanted to go to bed with me, I thought I was going out of my mind, because at that time . . .'

He had never wanted to go to bed with her. He glanced surreptitiously at his newspaper. There was a long article concerning the prospects of the great annual bicycle race, the *Tour de France*, being resumed in 1941; they were, apparently, good. The war was over. The resumption of this great sporting event would help the French to recall their healthiest and most admirable traditions.

'You won't like my saying this, but now I can tell you that the reason I wouldn't have an affair with you in those days was that I knew you were a great skirt-chaser.' The woman's voice was loud and penetrating as she pushed his paper to one side.

He replied calmly:

'You must be confusing me with someone else. My interest in women has never been above the average.'

She laughed now, and her laughter, too, was unpleasantly loud. Then she began again, teasing him about his imagined infidelities. Finally she said:

'Now you'd like to come back to my place. You've probably got no room, no bed – at least judging by your clothes and those two ridiculous little sacks of yours.'

He walked down to the harbour again. He felt someone was following him. He did not care. He waited for a long time for the others to get up and go away – surely they had beds? – so that he might stretch out on the bench. He was sleepy. But the bench remained occupied. He began to feel cold. He walked through the narrow streets whose walls gave out a certain warmth, and he felt sleepy no longer.

At a corner, in the circle of light cast by a street-lamp, he turned quickly around, asking:

'Why are you following me?'

The little man took half a step backwards, gave an awkward smile, and finally answered:

'I don't give a damn for you. I don't even know who you are. I'm just doing my job. If you haven't got enough money for a hotel room, I suggest I pay for two. I've had enough of this walking about all night. I'm not an old whore after all.' He spoke in German, with a strong Czech accent.

Doino turned the corner, but the man stuck with him. After a while he said:

'You're waking the people up with those hobnailed boots of yours. All the same, to judge by your grey hair you must know perfectly well you won't shake me off. Up by the church, not more than five minutes'

walk, there's an all-night café. Let's go there. At least we can sit down. You can have something to eat and drink if you like. I'll pay. Don't torture your fellow men. My feet are quite numb already.'

Doino sat down on a long, badly upholstered bench inside the café. In exchange for two tins of the liver-sausage the landlord gave him a beer, a cheese sandwich, a slice of melon and a *café-crème*. The little man went to the telephone. Doino wrote on a piece of paper his name, date of birth, last address in Paris and the words:

I have been murdered by agents of the G.P.U. and/or the Gestapo. Please inform Dr Meunier of the Boulevard Saint-Germain, Paris VI. I have forgotten the number of his house. He is to arrange that I be buried at Bezons (Lot et Garonne). He is to inform my friends.

I have been murdered not because I am in any way important or dangerous. Rather the contrary; I am to be squashed like a moribund house-fly buzzing at a closed window in winter-time.

He unlaced one shoe and slipped the piece of paper beneath the sole of his foot. The little man was coming back. Doino hastily unlaced the other shoe.

'Your feet are hurting you too, I see. Now have some sense, lie down on the bench and take a nap. I'm waiting for a friend who has good news for you. I'll wake you when he gets here.'

As Doino was dropping off to sleep he could feel somebody fiddling with the musette-bag beneath his head. He did not care or even open his eyes. He had no fear of dying, of being dead. For a long time he had feared death; the thought of it had been an anguish and a torment to him. But after Vasso had died – three years ago, when Stetten had taken him back to Vienna – he had begun to long for the time when he would himself no longer exist. Death had lost all its horrors; it was no longer even senseless. Later there were days, even weeks, when he did not live in the dark shadows: such was that summer of 1938 when Gaby was with him. But what had happened since had made life's burdens harder to bear than ever before. No, death had no more terrors for him.

He had been awakened and slowly he sat up. An exceptionally well-dressed, slender young man was standing in front of him. He spoke Croat with the intonation of a North Italian.

'Your name is Denis Faber? Your friend Karel says that unfortunately he cannot see you now, but that he will meet you day after to-morrow, in this café, at half-past twelve. You needn't worry, he'll arrange for your passage abroad. You'll travel on a diplomatic passport. In exchange you will do him a service, a small matter which you won't like

very much, but after all . . . in your position . . . I am to give you money and you are to buy some decent, smart clothes and luggage. When you've done that you are to take a room at a good hotel. We'll continue to watch you discreetly so that you don't get into any trouble or do anything foolish from desperation. But if anything displeases you, you must not hesitate to tell us. Karel wishes you to know that this time he does not intend to save you despite yourself. All the same, you must realise that you can't get away without our help. For example, we can't always arrange for the Americans to issue a visa, but we can always and very easily make sure they don't. The boss said that you'd understand without my going into any further details. What is your reply?

'You're from Dalmatia. Which village?'

'Trogir. What is your reply?'

'Nine years ago we buried Andrei Bocek near Trogir. He was as young then as you are now. But there was a difference. He was a revolutionary and you're an agent. Besides, your clothes are too conspicuously smart.'

'Not as conspicuous as your faded work-suit and your face full of hatred.'

'Tell your boss that I have an exact memory of the way Ottokar Wolfan was saved, and I prefer not to be helped by him.'

'You're not being serious! Don't you want the money either? Are you a suicide?'

'Yes, young man from beautiful Trogir, I am a suicide.'

'Is that your last word?'

Doino straightened the musette-bags and lay down again. The man waited for a while. Then he left the café.

Doino was too early, the offices of the American committee were still closed. He sat down on the top step and waited. Later an employee arrived who explained to him that there was no point in waiting, as he would not get in first but last, since he had no appointment. Towards noon he was shown into the office of an important individual. This man gazed at him somewhat in the way that boys who have been spoilt by their mothers will look at older women, with a mixture of deep revulsion and obscure, nervous desire. The man had a husky, alcoholic voice. He said, in English:

'My colleagues have told me all about you. You're probably in danger here. So you'd be justified in asking for a "danger visa". But there's a long list ahead of you. It would be months, maybe even years before you could leave. I doubt if you'd be able to wait that long.'

'I couldn't apply earlier. I was only demobilised yesterday morning. Are the people on your list in as dangerous a situation as I am, or more dangerous?'

The man buried his mouth and chin in the palm of his left hand and stared out of the window. He was relying on Doino losing his temper and feeling compelled to speak; then, no doubt, he would talk a great deal and quickly, so that there would be no need to answer his question. Doino's silence both bored and irritated the man.

'Meanwhile you've got to live, Mr Faber. We're also prepared to let you have a little money.'

'I asked you a question. You haven't answered it,' Doino replied.

'It is up to us, first of all, and then up to Washington to decide who gets a danger visa. Do you expect us to open all our files for you and let you decide who's to go?'

'No. I simply expect a clear answer to a straight question.'

'I've nothing more to say. You'll be given the forms to fill in at the desk opposite the door.'

'You have a difficult job, Mr Miller. I realise that. You're here because you really do want to help, but you'll end up by being an accomplice of the murderers and persecutors. I ought to strike you now so that at least you'd have the satisfaction of feeling that you were misunderstood, a martyr. And if I struck you you'd hardly feel it. You know, flies dying of cold in the winter-time neither bite nor fly. They're killed not for the pleasure of murder, but from a love of tidiness.'

The man had jumped to his feet. He opened the door behind him, crying:

'Richard, please come in here. Mr Faber is threatening to hit me because I won't show him our files.'

'My name is Richard Bellac. I advise my friend Steve Miller, when he wants any help. You know who I am, Faber, and I know exactly what you used to be, though I'm not so sure what you are now. I read your manifesto, in September or October I think it was. I do not altogether agree with it. This war is no concern of ours.'

'For the moment I am not interested in your opinions. I know that you're here simply because Hitler has not reached Marseilles. You'll flee across the ocean as soon as the Nazis approach. The contradictions inherent in your political formula of neutrality – your fear of Hitler and your hope that somebody else will defeat him – disgust me. So let's not discuss politics. I must get out and I wish to get out, I'm not neutral.'

'You've stopped being a revolutionary and have become a French chauvinist instead. I haven't changed: I'm the same person now that

I've always been, whether in Marseilles in August, 1940, or in Stalin's prisons.'

Miller leaned against the window, watching the two men. He felt – and this distressed him – that the bond between them was somehow greater than their expressed disagreement. A lot of what they said he could not understand, and the meaning of many allusions escaped him. Then the tone of their remarks changed, and with it the whole atmosphere of the conversation; the American had scarcely realised that they were now talking about something entirely different. Bellac was sitting slumped forward with a white face and staring eyes. Faber sat bolt upright and his face was now flushed, though his lips remained pale. The movement of his lips was so constant and yet so slight that Miller was amazed at the clarity of his diction.

'In that same loneliness our best friends died, as well you know, Bellac. Because a man is only truly alone when confronted by a friend who has turned enemy at the very moment when everything is dependent on his loyalty. There are only a few hundred of us left in all the world, probably even only a few dozen. And it is our own fault that we are so few. You, Bellac, helped in the destruction of the Kronstadt revolutionaries. A man called Milan Petrovitch once sat opposite me just exactly as I am sitting opposite you now. Before the night was over he knew that he was lost. It was months later that the Bergen-Oslo express ran over his body. But before that happened we had already poisoned him with the deadly poison of loneliness – for political reasons we did it, good, sound political reasons. I am guilty of the death of an old friend; he wanted to save us both but I stopped him. He died like a dog driven out into the blizzard. And how do you know, Bellac, that I want to be saved? What am I still looking for, Bellac, except the last proof that I can do nothing more, that I now have the right to give up? But if I leave this office now, Bellac, then I am Milan Petrovitch and you are . . .'

'Don't go, Faber. We must work it all out together.' Bellac's voice was weak.

'I know what that is, Richard Bellac. That's your heart, frightened of the possibility of being wrong, too cowardly to be a coward – those were the words of one of our few dozen fellows. There's nothing to work out.'

He made his way through the crowds waiting outside. Going down-stairs he held on to the banister. Somebody called his name. He hurried out of the house and quickly disappeared around a corner.

He walked to the harbour and sat down on his bench. He was happy

to find it unoccupied, for thus it belonged to him; this was now his home, and he could probably sit here for a whole hour. It was midday and doubtless the others were eating.

The day was close and heavy; the invisible rays of the sun, which was hidden by clouds, seemed to sting like swarms of gnats. His bread had become hard and stale. He had difficulty in chewing it, as his mouth was so dry. He stretched out on the bench and closed his eyes. He wished to rest for a short time; then he would leave this town. He felt quite calm now as he composed the text of the letters he must write. One to Mara and Djoura, one to Dr Meunier, and one to Relly. Had she not sent him the *Certificat Hébergement* he would not have been demobilised. She was doubtless expecting him at this moment.

'Excuse me, but this is the fourth time that I have been by your bench. Surely I am not mistaken, am I?'

Doino opened his eyes and sat up. He saw before him a powerfully-built, well-dressed man in an expensive, double-breasted, dark-blue suit, a starched white shirt, and holding an elegant hat in his hand. The man said who he was – Doctor of Engineering Heinrich Liebmann. He was not mistaken; they had met in Berlin and Hamburg and, more recently, in Paris.

He sat down contentedly and mopped his face with a silk handkerchief, which he then carefully folded up and tucked elegantly back into his breast pocket.

'I must admit that one can learn something from you. I've always known that, incidentally, and I've spoken to my wife about you on many occasions. You manage to hide in the middle of Marseilles simply by putting on the sort of clothes nobody would expect you to wear. I envy you your courage. I heard the frightful news just three hours ago, and since then I've been feeling quite simply as though I'd been stunned. No doubt you heard it early this morning. Am I right?'

It was a few minutes before Doino grasped what the man was talking about. He had it from a 'very highly placed' source that the first lists had arrived – the list of the émigrés whose extradition the Germans were demanding. In the 'absolutely reliable' copy of this list which Liebmann had been shown he had found, among many others, his own name and that of Faber.

'The extradition clause of the armistice agreement should not apply to me,' said Doino. 'I've never been a German citizen.'

'That won't make any difference to the French,' replied Heinrich Liebmann bitterly. 'You don't know them yet.'

'In any case, no one can hand me over if I refuse to let them. And I

shall,' Doino answered with a smile, noticing the perspiring giant's stiff collar.

'I know why you are able to talk that way. And it seems to me a great piece of unmerited luck for me that I should have run across you at just this moment. You can save me at the same time as you save yourself. Tell me, my dear friend, might I invite you to lunch with me? It's late, but until I met you I'd completely lost my appetite. I've been running about this city like a rat full of rat-poison.'

In the restaurant the nature of Liebmann's mistake soon became apparent. He believed that Faber was regarded by the Russians as an 'extremely important' individual, that he could at any time ask for a Russian passport and thus be able to escape to Russia by sea. Why should Faber not also intervene on his behalf? True he had been a capitalist, part owner and general director of a very large concern, but he was also – and this was all that should count – an internationally famous electrical expert. Politically he could claim close collaboration in the past with that great, truly democratic minister whom the Nazis had murdered long before they seized power.

Doino told him of his break with the Russians three years ago. The man's disappointment was so complete that he might be thought to have based his whole past life on this one ray of hope. But after a few minutes he more or less recovered his composure and began to be more optimistically inclined. After all, it was not yet certain that the French would agree to extradite the men the Germans had asked for. In any case his wife, Gertrud, would surely think of a way out. To start with they could always go into hiding. Then he had relations in England and America and a certain amount of money, both here and abroad. Doino should come with him to his little estate in the Var; it was remote and quite near the coast. They were companions in adversity now and, besides, Liebmann did not like the idea of travelling alone. His wife, too, would be pleased to have a guest in the house, particularly when she heard the appalling news.

The wife welcomed the unexpected guest. She had doubtless seen the men approaching, for she came down to meet them at the big gate which led into the courtyard of the Provençal *mas*. She was about fifty years old, tall and slender, with an austere beauty which made her appear younger. They talked easily – about the garden, the location of the house, the blessings of shade which were only understood when one reached the south. Yet Doino was aware of the intense anxiety and acute strain beneath her self-control.

He stayed in his room until Liebmann called him down for the evening meal. The big table was laid as though for a celebration. As he sat down he felt that there was something strange about this meal: all the objects on the table seemed to have a double significance, were simultaneously things and symbols, were echoes of the past, or perhaps omens of the future, in a game filled with allusions where identity and contrast were so intermingled that anything might have any meaning. His shabby clothes were a defiance, even as this opulence was both pride unbowed and the acceptance of defeat. The heavy, antique furniture had been transported here from the aristocratic Hamburg household as though it were so much stolen goods. The damask and the crystal and the blue china, it was all part of a rout. This might be their last evening in the house; it might be the last night of their guest's life.

'Gertrud, I rather feel that olive oil tends to be indigestible in such hot weather.' Liebmann spoke as though announcing a discovery made after a lengthy examination of his conscience.

'It is possible to imagine Hellas without Homer, but not Mediterranean civilisation without wine and olives,' said Faber with mock seriousness as he turned back the frayed cuffs of his army shirt. Too late he thought that he should have done this more discreetly, perhaps beneath the level of the table. Again he raised his glass to his lips. Stetten was right about that too: for a whole evening Moselle wine was probably the best.

'These are the last bottles from our own vineyard at Bernkastel. It doesn't belong to us any more, nothing belongs to us any longer, as I think I told you. Come, let us empty the bottles!'

Liebmann gave his wife an astonished glance. This evening she was letting him do as he wished, allowing him to eat and drink more than was good for him. Normally she was affectionately strict. It was as though she were letting a man in the condemned cell enjoy his last breakfast on earth.

'She looks like Gaby,' Doino thought. 'She looks like all those women who can make a young man first solemnly foolish and then witty, bold and then sad.'

'Now what shall we drink to, my friend?' Liebmann asked.

'The fact that I have ever drunk to anyone other than Frau Gertrud is a mistake which shows both folly and ingratitude on my part.'

'Unfortunately you never honoured us with your company either in Hamburg or in Berlin,' the husband remarked in a grieved tone.

'From Meung-sur-Loire to Roussilon, Faber begs forgiveness,' he parodied.

Lifting his glass, he went on:

'Your drawing-room, Frau Gertrud, seemed to me hardly the right slipway from which to launch the revolution of the German proletariat, to say nothing of the world revolution. And that was what I spent my time trying to do; by astronomic standards not a great deal of time, simply my whole life.'

She not only resembled Gaby, but also his sister before she became a mother. No, he was not befuddled, he hadn't drunk as much as all that.

'If you insist on talking seriously, my dear Liebmann, I can tell you that your salvation is as good as certain. There is in Paris a man by the name of Dr Meunier – he will perform quite improbable actions. He doesn't as yet know this. He is still lonely, as bourgeois men of a certain age tend to be – the age at which they realise that the success which has preoccupied them for so long has not fulfilled their beings but has drained them. His unhappiness is still cheap poetry, but the time will soon come when everything he does will assume significance and importance, and not for himself alone.'

'What do you mean? What can this man do for me? And how can I get in touch with him?'

'I said significance and importance – and you, Frau Gertrud, understood at once. Out of gratitude, I propose to drink this toast: may all those whom you have encountered preserve in their hearts a picture of you as I see you now!'

'You said significance and importance not only for him, not only for this Paris doctor who will perform improbable actions of which he is still unaware.' Frau Gertrud smiled as she raised her glass to him. 'Go on, my young friend. I enjoy listening to you. I am grateful to you for what you say about a picture of me, and also for the fact that you will not refer to it again.'

'Let us start with something quite unimportant but still indicative: he will change his name, clumsily, to Charles Maillet, shall we say. That's the sort of pseudonym one would expect from a beginner. Then he might call himself Marcel Coppet – still too close to the past, the same initials in reverse. But one evening in a suburban street on his way to a very dangerous meeting, he'll notice a faded advertisement for a movie and the name Robert Vignat. He'll turn it into two names. Some people will know him as Robert, others as Vignat – for a month, maybe for as long as six weeks. Then he'll have other names, a different appearance, new addresses.'

'Excuse me, my dear Faber, but could you please tell me what you're talking about? And forgive me, Gertrud, but though I'm very fond of

strong coffee I'm supposed only to drink it weak. One would think that you believed there was no hope for me. I'm amazed.'

'One of the things I've loved about you is that you, a clever man, have always been so readily amazed. Now we'll just sit quietly and hear about the future life of this strange doctor who can save your life.'

'Well, if I'm allowed anything I like this evening, I'll . . .'

'Yes, Heinrich, everything is allowed tonight. Get the cigars and the brandy. Now, Herr Faber, tell us more.'

'Madame, you must go to see Mcunier and explain the situation to him. He'll understand completely and at once and he won't hesitate to do whatever may be necessary. That will mark the beginning of his new career - this sixty-year-old man, in poor health, will become an adventurer the way other men sit down to a well-deserved meal after their day's work is done. I should like another cup of coffee, and then I'll tell you the message that you must take him. He will later pass it on to my friends, at least to the few who are still alive. But in order that you may fully understand I must first speak of the dead, of my friend Vasso, for example, of my old teacher Stetten who died on *Route Nationale* 341; or, for example, of Andrei and Voyko and Soennecke and Petrovitch and of Sergei Liboff. In order to understand the living it is essential first to know who are their dead. It is also important how their hopes ended, whether they faded away or were smashed. It is more important, Madame, to know the scars of renunciation than the features of the living face. You see, there are only a very few of us now left in the world.'

He felt that he must get up and put his head under a cold tap or walk up and down in the garden and count his steps so as to stop himself thinking. He knew that he was talking confusedly. He seemed to see a great board on which appeared words formed of luminous letters; a few of them he would speak aloud before they vanished and others appeared of which again he could only utter a few. He knew the entire texts: the one about the recurrence of events, for instance. Hegel had formulated it, but it was not so simple. There was twice, for Liboff, a bend in the road: his son had died there, Jeannot he had tried to save. On both occasions he had been too late. But there was also another connection, for first of all Liboff had betrayed his friend. Of all this Doino simply said:

'Be careful, Frau Gertrud, to remember that the meaning of the road-bend's double occurrence must not be over-estimated. Let us avoid symbolism! The essential fact took place before, at that meeting, that's certain. First the tragedy, then the farce? No, things are not as simple as

that. The farce was already inherent in the tragedy, and becomes itself tragic in its recurrence.'

Yes, she resembled his sister Hanna more closely than she did Gaby. Hanna used to sit up late at night, waiting for him to come home and for his enthusiastic or ironic conversation. At that time young women had often looked at him the way Frau Gertrud was doing now. It had flattered his vanity. In a few hours he was to die, with his vanity unchanged. The young women had been seduced by the words which they did not understand; it did not matter. Gertrud did not understand him now; that was also unimportant. But she must take his message to Meunier. Therefore he had to make it all easy and comprehensible. He must give her the complete text, not just accidental excerpts.

'Mark this well, my dearest Gertrud, there are no such things as accidental excerpts. We have made it our business to obviate accidents. Yes, you may well smile! I'd have loved you for your smile if I had met you fifteen years ago: 1925 that would have been. Let me think for a moment. Yes, that was a good year. Even Relly would admit that, though we separated soon after. The manner in which I left her - no, we won't discuss that. But it is something evil in my life. She's forgiven me for it long ago, of course, but that's not the point. It is the same with Stalin. Were he to walk in here now and say: "From now on it will all be different: I shall atone for my crimes." I would reply: "Only if the dead are brought back to life and if they forgive everything . . ." No, Frau Gertrud, even that would now make no difference. And that is a part of the message which Meunier must pass on to my friends. No atonement and no forgiveness. Whatever time may bring there can be no shaking hands across a river of blood. I should now go and take a cold shower. But I cannot stop talking so long as your eyes are listening. So we shall remain banished until such time as the young men come to us and say: "Master, it is the hour for you to say the morning prayer." It is written thus, in Hebrew. When I was very small and on very close terms with God I used to throw pebbles at the sky. One day, I hoped, He would open His door and give me an angry look. Then I'd have the chance to complain to Him about the injustice here on earth. God would be startled to begin with, but then he would see to it that these matters were put right. You would like to know how this story ends, but that is one of the two secrets which I cannot reveal to you. Enough chatter! It is getting late and I must leave early in the morning, for a rowboat awaits me. Your husband has dropped off to sleep, as in some domestic comedy. Stetten was very fond of that sort of play. If he were still alive at this moment he would walk in and say: "I have bought all the row-

boats from the Golfe du Lion to Ventimiglia, and have arranged that they be guarded better than you guarded your old friend. So your boating party and your accident at sea will not now take place. You are to come with me. The hotel is first-rate, and we have our own bathroom and big private loggia. It is high time we finally got down to our book on political assassination. There is not a day to lose." You will agree, dearest Gertrud, there is no profit in a world where a Karel or one of his agents turns up instead of a Stetten whom one is awaiting. Madame, mark this carefully: we stormed heaven not that we might live there, but in order to show all mankind, *ad oculos*, that heaven is empty. But now it appears that we were merely an advance party, sent ahead to arrange billets for the Karels and the super-Karels.

It was all idle chatter and it disgusted him. It was wrong to be drunk. He went to the bathroom, undressed quickly and took a shower. When he came back Frau Gertrud had made fresh coffee. Yes, it was better now, the board with the luminous writing had disappeared. For a time he said nothing while he put his ideas in order. He was thinking of practical matters, such as what was to be done with the fortune which Stetten had left him – later, when the war would be over. When he said this the woman interrupted him.

"Then you actually believe Hitler will be defeated?" There was astonishment in her voice.

"Undoubtedly. If England holds out for three months, Hitler has lost – in three or five or perhaps eight years."

"In that case I don't understand . . ." she said thoughtfully.

He paid no attention to her. He was thinking of the second message. But now he found it extremely difficult to talk. Also his heart was causing him pain, perhaps as a result of the strong coffee. What was worrying him was how to express this idea: that the novelty of the age was not its vileness but only the technical means on which that vileness relied. The misuse of ideas and their reversal when put into practice, the debasement by bureaucracy and the enslavement of the innocent, the extermination of minorities and the concentration camps – all those phenomena were in no way new. The age had not invented them; it had simply rediscovered them. It could be factually proved that that was all old hat.

What was new, on the other hand, was that no political party and no tyrant dared any longer to announce a belief in the baseness of man; that the idea of equality, perverted indeed and misused, had become the controlling concept; that man's increasing mastery over the forces of nature resulted in a corresponding freeing of human force, so that

within a predictable time it would no longer be possible to refuse men as social beings that freedom which they would have won in cosmic terms. Finally, what was new was the abominable example of Russia, which was an evident warning against certain specific errors.

'This age is a resumé of world history, which is why those people who do not know that history properly tend to believe that it marks its end. But the apocalypse, Madame, is only a literary term to describe feared or hoped-for events; incidentally, it is also one of the weakest parts of the New Testament. A man who cannot understand the Bible is attracted by that anthology of plagiarisms. No civilisation has ever really been destroyed, and ours is less threatened than any of its predecessors because it is of global proportions. And if one day it had to seek refuge in virgin forests, it would soon transform those forests before spreading out again to cover the earth. For this is the essential truth of history: men create more than they destroy; past accomplishment is stronger than present events; procreation is quicker than death. And there I am no doubt apparently contradicting my whole past life. Because the specific aim of us revolutionaries has been to perform deeds and to bring about events which would be stronger than past accomplishment. I no longer have a watch, Gertrud. What time is it? Only just after twelve? Let us go into the garden, it's too hot in here. I shall be able to think more clearly out there and to say in a few sentences what has to be said.'

They walked up and down in silence. The air had not yet grown cool and no breath of wind stirred among the leaves of the trees. The birds were silent as though waiting for something that would never happen.

She said, and her voice trembled:

'Everything you say is so full of hope. I do not understand why you wish to die.'

He did not answer. He was determined to explain that the revolutionary is necessary since he personifies contemporary self-criticism, that critical conscience thanks to which a society eventually finds itself intolerable. He spoke in short, clipped sentences, and he felt that his effort to resolve the contradictions in his thought was vain.

'Everything I have said is just superficial chatter. So I shall stay with you a little longer – until nearly noon – and shall sleep. When I wake up refreshed I shall put it all on paper in twenty sentences.' His voice was resigned.

She stopped walking. He looked her in the face and saw that the austerity of her features had relaxed. She appeared older, a woman of

fifty or more, aware that what is now close at hand and obtainable can at any moment become inaccessibly remote. She said:

'I am grateful to you. You have allowed me to listen to you as though I were a young girl, and you have let me see that there is a place beyond despair where hope is resurrected, as the Saviour was after death.'

She took his arm. She would now have liked to talk endlessly of the special dangers which threatened her husband and herself: of the son who had gone over to the enemy and who might one day reappear, a victor whom it was equally painful to hate and not to hate. She would willingly have explained to Faber how she suffered from the confusion of her own emotions, which made her disgusted with herself; in the simplicity of her thoughts she condemned both son and mother alike – for the mother, in a moment of weakness, had helped the son to disown his father and to become the enemy of all she loved and valued.

But now it was too late. If Faber stayed until midday he might possibly stay longer. At the moment he was far away and quite unlike the man who, only one hour ago, had pronounced her name with tenderness.

He awoke and it was still night. No, he had no message to send. He wrote a few lines to Meunier in which he asked him to do what he could for the Liebmanns. He left a letter for his hosts, thanking them and begging their forgiveness for his brusque departure. Then he walked out of the house.

The road led upwards, away from the coast. He looked for a path leading down to the right. He did not find one. He had been walking too fast and had become heated, so he slackened his pace.

Day was breaking. He said to himself: 'This is my last dawn. Everything that I do now I am doing for the last time.' He found this idea despicably fraught with self-pity. Such a death was productive neither of messages that would be worth listening to nor of serious thoughts. And it did not even prevent him feeling thirsty or conscious of a sore throat caused by too much smoking and drinking and talking.

Finally he found the path and soon he saw a distant expanse of blue water. The sea was far away. He lay down beneath an olive tree and after a while he fell asleep. When he awoke he felt calm once more. He left the path and walked across the fields. He seemed to hear the screech of gulls, but he could not see them. He walked through a little wood where there were picnickers enjoying an outing on this fine summer's day. They told him that he was walking along a peninsula. He went back and came to a bathing beach. Brightly-coloured umbrellas and

deck-chairs were scattered along it. Children were building castles in the sand and young people were playing handball.

He was tempted to walk straight into the water, deeper and deeper, and simply not to swim. But there were too many people about. It must appear to be an accident, not a suicide.

He left the bay and the road began to climb again, away from the sea. The land between was cut up into allotments, separated from one another by barbed wire.

The heat was oppressive. His shirt clung to his body and his boots were unbearably heavy.

He stood still, as though bewitched. Immediately ahead of him, where the road turned down to the left, between two rocky headlands that stretched far out to sea, there was an upturned rowboat, its tarred keel glistening black in the sunshine. It was waiting for him. He hurried now, and his boots no longer seemed so heavy. He looked for a path that led down to the water but could find none. Impatiently he began to clamber down the rocks. It was hard going; he grazed his knee and his legs started to tremble. Finally he was down. He waded through the water, and once he fell and banged his forehead. When he was about two hundred yards from the boat he saw that somebody was sitting beside it. He was bitterly disappointed to realise that his scramble down the cliff-face had been a pointless waste of time. Now, too, he found the path for which he had searched in vain. He took it in order to get back up to the road. He heard cries, of a woman or of a child. It was no concern of his. The cries grew louder and he glanced that way. It was a small boy by the boat who was shouting uninterruptedly. Doino reached the path and began to climb. The cries were closer now and he could distinguish the words:

'Please, sir! Sir, please, please!'

He did not wish to turn around, for there was no reason why anyone should call to him. Also he did not wish to hear the child's agonised voice; then the sound became one of noisy weeping. He could not bear to hear children weep. He turned back and looked down. The certainty that he was now no longer at liberty to die was as painful as a final act of renunciation.

He ran down and picked up the child.

The boy might be eight or possibly nine years old. He had hurt his chin and his lower lip was bleeding. His left knee, too, was badly grazed. Doino stroked back the hair from the boy's damp forehead and said:

'I come from the war and my name's Doino. What's your name? Where do you come from?'

'Jeannot. Garnier Jean-Pierre. From St Quentin. The Delecourts, they . . .'

Anguish overwhelmed him and he wept uncontrollably. He held out his hand and Doïno took the crumpled sheet of paper. He read:

We've had little Jeannot with us since his mother's death. We've done everything for him we could. For two whole months now we've treated him exactly as if he were our own boy. And it's been very difficult for us, because we are refugees ourselves. Now we're going home and we can't look after him any longer. He has a relative in Cannes, Raymond Legendre by name, his mother's uncle.

We're entitled to keep the car because ours was destroyed at the time. If we hadn't taken poor Madame Garnier's car it would certainly have been stolen. After all we've done for the boy it belongs to us by rights.

And, by way of postscript:

We can strongly recommend the child, who is a poor orphan now. Jeannot is brave, obedient, polite and truthful.

Doïno took a clean handkerchief from his bread bag and gave it to Jeannot. Good, clever eyes, he thought. Too thin. The sleeves of his jacket are too short and his arms stick out of the cuffs like squirrels peeping from their holes; his knees are like the heads of little kittens.

'Keep the handkerchief, Jeannot, you'll need it again. Besides, I think we'll stay together now. If you can manage to stop crying I'll tell you something curious which I'm sure will interest you.'

'I'm not crying any more. It's just that I've waited and waited and waited. And then when I found the letter I ran after you and I fell over. . . . You see, I've no father or mother or any more, and . . .'

He sobbed.

'That's just what I wanted to tell you, Jeannot, because it's curious. In the Great War, the one before this, I lost my father and mother too. I was only a little older than you at the time. Just now, when I walked down to the water's edge, I was thinking that I had nobody left, nobody needed me, and perhaps there was no point in trying to start all over again after such a war. Yes, that's what I was thinking, and then, all of a sudden, you're here. You're alone and I'm alone. And of course that changes everything. Do you understand, Jeannot?'

'Yes. If we're together then we're not alone. I understand, sir,' the boy replied, and with his fists he rubbed the tears from his eyes.

'Just call me Doïno. Soon there'll be the grape harvest. We'll work side by side in the vineyards, we'll pick the grapes together, and I'll

carry down the baskets when they're full. And when you're picking them, you know, you're allowed to eat as many as ever you want. But perhaps you don't like grapes?

'Oh, I do. I love them even better than raspberries.'

'Good. I only mentioned grapes as an example, to show you that you can help me, that I need you.'

'Yes, but the harvest doesn't go on all the time, and in the winter I have to go to school. . . .'

'Of course, and then I can help you. I've learned quite a lot in my life. Half an hour ago I thought it was all in vain – what I had learned, I mean. . . . And now we'll climb up to the village together and sit down in the shade. I'll sell these heavy army boots of mine and buy a cheap pair of rope-soles, and with the money that's left we'll eat and drink. And then we'll get somebody to give us a lift to St Raphael or even to Cannes, which is a very pretty place. And we'll do everything together and nothing alone.'

'It's good to be together,' Jeannot said with a deep sigh, 'it's really good.'

Jeannot could hardly walk since his foot hurt him badly. Doïno hoisted him on to his back. They climbed slowly upwards, leaving behind them the sea and the road, the olive groves and the red rocks of a stone quarry. They stopped to rest in a little wood. Through the trees they could see the white and pink houses of the village, brilliant in the sunshine. Such was the first stage of their journey together.

